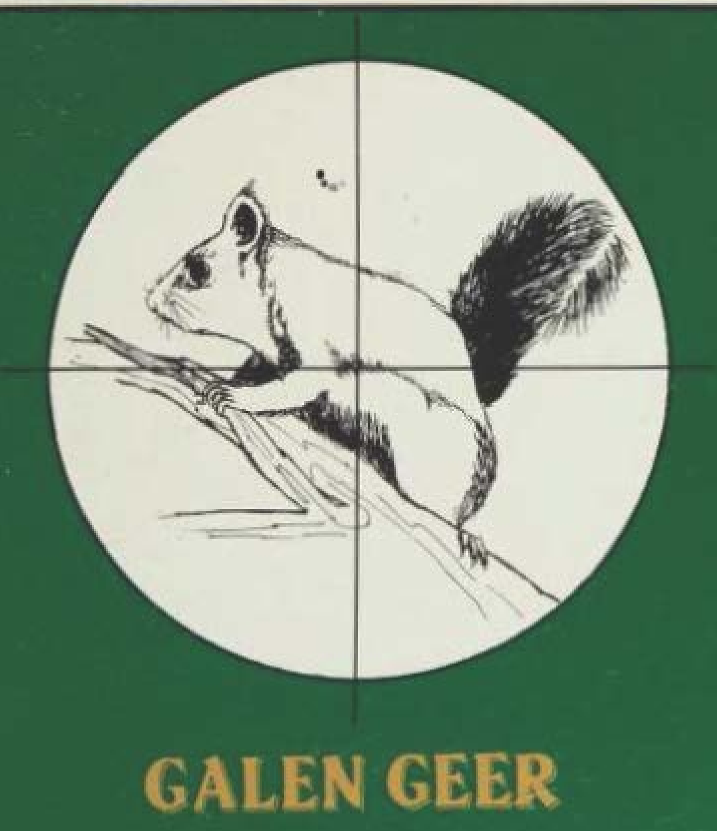
M·E·A·T ON THE TABLE

MODERN SMALL-GAME HUNTING



GALEN GEER

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CONTENTS

Introduction 1
1. Hunting Guns and Arms 9
2. Game Handling 49
3. Rabbits and Hares 63
4. Squirrels 89
5. Varmints 105
6. Raccoons, Opossums, and Pests 121
7. Predators 131
8. Upland Birds 145
9. Quail 175
10. Wild Turkey 193
11. Pest Birds 201
12. In Closing 205

INTRODUCTION

Every Saturday morning, Kenny Stilwell and I would tie our guns to the handlebars of our bicycles and head out of town to go hunting. We kept up this ritual through the autumn and into the winter. On biting cold mornings, the snow would be crusted over, and long, clear fingers of ice would hang precariously from the edges of roofs. As we pedaled our bikes down the streets, following the tire tracks in the snow, we would slowly warm up and begin shedding clothes. Usually we were headed for a farm north of town where a farmer let us hunt rabbits along the tree-lined creek that meandered through his land.

I recall one wintry morning a few weeks after the murder of President Kennedy when Kenny and I took off for a day's hunting. Although we were chastised for not being in mourning like the rest of our families, we shook off the admonishments of the adults and headed for the woods.

We stopped to rest near the halfway point. Our breath crystallized in front of our faces, hung in the air for a few seconds, and then drifted slowly away. Having reached the teen years and without the cares of the world that would later assault us, we were exhilarated in spite of the cold. There was good reason for our excitement. Word had spread through the bars and restaurants in town that a deer had been seen less than fifty miles from town. Even more exciting was the prospect of quail in the area. According to a man who actually hunted quail, he had flushed a covey of bobwhites near the river.

"Wouldn't that be something," Kenny said, staring off into the whiteness surrounding us. "Be out huntin' rabbits and jump a whole mess of quail! Man, I've never seen a quail. I don't even know what they look like!"

"Not much you could do about seeing one with that twenty-two," I said, feeling a little more smug than I intended to and letting it creep into my voice. I patted the single-shot .410 shotgun roped to the handlebars. "I've got two boxes of shells for this baby as well as these," and I reached into my pocket and pulled out five slugs and handed one to my friend. He turned the shell over slowly, admiring the solid lead slug that was flush with the end of the slender shell. "When I heard about that deer I thought I'd better see if I could find something that would bring it down."

"You can't shoot it even if you do see it," Kenny snorted.

"Why not?"

"It isn't the season. Besides, there aren't any deer around here; the nearest deer are over on the Salt Fork. That's where they've been seeing them." He wiped his nose and started to climb on his bike. "We'll be lucky to see a squirrel and a half-dozen rabbits."

"Suppose so," I agreed, and then climbed on my own bicycle and began to follow Kenny down the narrow wheel path in the snow.

That afternoon we returned home with three rabbits. Two fell to Kenny's rifle and one to my shotgun. We never saw a quail and the lone squirrel we saw was gone in a flash. Throughout my early years in Oklahoma I saw only one covey of quail. I believe it was the same covey the nameless hunter saw along the river. Not once did I see a deer. I grew up believing deer were only in Colorado, where my parents and I hunted in the fall. Only rarely did we see coyotes, bobcats, foxes, or waterfowl.

Some people might believe the late fifties and early sixties were the "good ol' days," but they weren't. From the 1940s through the mid-sixties, American wildlife declined at an alarming rate. In many parts of the nation, the wildlife population was wiped out except for pest animals that thrive on human garbage. If I had to pick a date for the turning point in American hunting since 1940, I would pick 1963. That was the year Americans were shocked into taking a serious look at themselves, their nation, and the course they were set on.

Prior to the murder of Jack Kennedy, Americans were hellbent on consumption. If it could be plowed—plow it! If it could be cut—cut it! If it could be paved—pave it! We were still wallowing in the victory of the big war, and Vietnam was only a dark shadow on the horizon. That wildlife might suffer from the construction of a new road was not as important as having a new road to the top of the hill. Tract homes were built in assembly-line fashion, and parcels of green belt and woodlots were carved by tractors. Often hunters were also guilty. We shot owls and hawks thinking these birds were pests, and we cursed other predators for "stealing wildlife from the hunters!" We just did not understand the role of many of these animals in the world.

As JFK slumped over in the seat of the limo, America seemed to sit up and look around. The decade that followed was destined to be one of the most turbulent in our history. For most of us, hunters and nonhunters[1] alike, a new commitment to wildlife preservation and the preservation of our sport (as well as the Second Amendment) was born.

Seventeen years passed before I returned to my boyhood home to hunt. When I stepped out onto the Oklahoma soil, very little was the same. Carefully maintained "edges" skirted the fields providing cover and food for wild game. Woodlots that were once targeted for the blade had been spared and thickets of wild plums and berries grew where none had been seen in thirty years. At my feet I saw the unmistakable hoof print of a deer in the soft soil. As we walked, I found turkey trails leading to the river and kicked up several coveys of quail. Squirrels jumped from branch to branch above me, and an eagle soared through the sky above the trees. Less than twenty years before I would have been impressed to see a half-dozen rabbits. On that day, I shot my limit of ten bunnies in under two hours and let twice that many run away without firing a shot.

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[1] Nonhunters are not necessarily antihunters. My wife is a nonhunter in that she does not go into the field with a gun and hunt game. She does, however, support hunting. The distinction between nonhunters and antihunters is important.

My brother Albert and I talked about the hunting that night in his farm home living room. "What happened?" I asked.

"People got smart, I guess," Albert said. He'd always been a hunter and fisherman. He taught me how to wing shoot, track game, and field dress my first rabbit. He seemed to know the numbers and areas of all the game animals in the rolling country surrounding his home. "Farmers got together with the wildlife people and quit trying to plant right up to the fence. They left edges for small game and kept their mouths shut when deer were planted on their lands. I don't even think some people were aware of what was going on around here, but the game was being put back—quietly. Now," Albert smiled, "I don't have to travel more than a few miles in any direction to hunt whatever I want."

Oklahoma, like many other states, had been involved in a long project to restore depleted game animals. The early 1900s had seen the end of deer hunting in Oklahoma, and it took decades to build the number of animals back up. Progress in wildlife management was slow at best. Managers had to learn the hard way, by trial and error, what birds and animals could be restored and to identify the needs of the animals. Gaining the support of landowners to permit animals to be placed on their lands was a major step that often involved hours of quiet pleading with farmers who saw visions of hordes of hunters tramping down crops, breaking fences, and shooting cattle. The effort paid off.

When I am asked what era I believe will be remembered as the most productive small-game era in American history following World War I, I would have to answer the 1980s. Most types of small game, however, will never again reach the levels of the 1800s[2] and the years of expansion into rural America. Still, the number of game animals today is higher than in the fifties and, more importantly for the hunter, there are more areas to hunt animals, both public and private. No matter what part of the nation you live in, there are lands, large and small, in which you can hunt. These include national forest and Bureau of Land Management lands, wildlife management areas, and private lands leased by the government for hunting.

Another reason we can all enjoy hunting is the equipment of today compared to that of twenty or thirty years ago. Modern hunting equipment, from guns to optics to ammunition to all of the various "hunting aids," is more lightweight, easily used, long lasting, and inexpensive compared to the past.

All in all there has been a general improvement in the shooting sport, which has helped to expand the number of Americans taking up hunting. A lot of hunters I've talked with in the field have cited the advances made in equipment as their reason for taking up the sport. Others have quoted the economics of hunting.

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[2] While some species of wildlife have declined in number, others, such as the wild turkey, have expanded through the efforts of various game agencies. For more information on what species may be found in your area that are not native or have been reestablished, contact the local office of your state game and fish department.

"There was a time," one hunter told me at the Queens Wildlife Management Area in eastern Colorado, "when I couldn't afford to hunt. Everything was just too expensive. I had to drive a hundred miles just to hunt rabbits. When the prices on hunting equipment came to within reason and I found I could hunt within a few miles of my home, I took up the sport again. I figure the average cost of putting meat on the table is about eighty cents a pound. I've taken a deer every year for the past three years; that plus rabbit, quail, goose, duck, and pheasant puts a fair amount of meat in the freezer each fall."

There is, of course, a darker side to the sport: the antihunting faction, which seeks a ban on the "blood sports." Convinced that hunters will destroy wildlife, this group wants to ban hunting from the nation. I believe groups such as Friends of Animals, Greenpeace, etc., do not use the money they collect to help wildlife but to attack hunters. Many hunters, on the other hand, have been involved for many years in fighting to help wildlife by building nesting areas, planting wild crops, raising money to buy land for wildlife, and donating both time and money to wildlife.

Hunters must counter the threat to their sport by becoming educated in their sport and working to preserve it. Every time a hunter goes into the field, he must show the world he is a sportsman and conservationist and committed to preserving not only the hunting sports but all wildlife equally. Anything less is unacceptable.

We must preserve wildlife by supporting today's game laws and taxes that support wildlife programs. To ensure both quality and quantity of game, wildlife managers must manage both the hunter and the hunted. Today's hunters are more successful than in the past, and there are more of them. The hunter can be used to control populations so that a healthy species can be maintained without growing beyond what a given area can safely support.

Although we enjoy an abundance of game animals today, those numbers are still in danger. Demand for natural resources has clamped a lid on how much more can be done to protect our wildlife. Those areas now in the public trust must be held onto at all cost.

This book serves two purposes. The first is to introduce the new hunter to the confusing world of modern hunting, guns and equipment, as well as the species. Chapter 1 provides an overview of hunting guns and arms which will be useful to the reader in the later chapters. The second purpose is to provide the reader with background on the various species and the techniques for successfully hunting them.

Hunters who have spent two or more decades in the field will find some changes in the sport from earlier years. We no longer hunt owls, except in rare cases. Animals such as fox, coyote, and the smaller cats are losing their "varmint" classification and becoming accepted as either fur bearers (hunted for their pelts) or predators. Another change important to bird hunters is the new access to remote areas where game birds such as the blue grouse and ptarmigan are found. Today's hunter can reach these birds in their high country sanctuaries because of the controlled opening of forest access roads.

Still other changes are found in the hunter's world. Modern high-velocity air guns make it possible to hunt small game in woodlots near urban areas where a .22's range would be dangerous and the boom of a shotgun would be too loud. Finally, we are using a wider variety of arms to bring down game. Sophisticated archery equipment such as crossbows and even modern, powerful slingshots are accepted as hunter's weapons.

Obviously, the hunter is a complex and important aspect of modern game management. Today young hunters can expect to see quail, deer, squirrels, wild turkeys, and a host of other wild animals, both game and nongame. That is the world we now have, that is the world we want to hold onto—at all cost, against all odds. It is our stake in the future.

1.

HUNTING GUNS AND ARMS

I suppose that at one time or another anything that can be shot, thrown, launched, or set to spring shut has been used to help put meat on the table. With today's shopping centers catering to every whim of society, it would seem a little inane to suggest that the great percentage of Americans who hunt do so for food. Still, with all the wonders of the modern world and the great supply of food in this country, a fair share of the hunters who take to the woods do so with the intent of putting food on the table.

The question of whether hunting for food actually cuts the per-pound cost of putting meat on the table is too complex for this book. However, I should point out that it is possible to cut hunting costs by sharing the cost of the hunt with others, limiting the distance between home and the hunting area, and using the right weapon for the game. For years, I have relied on wild game to cut our meat bill. When I can put meat on the table for less than eighty cents a pound, I know I am cutting the cost of food. Frequently, I can reduce the cost to around sixty cents a pound by sharing the hunting cost with others.

I am not the only person who relies on hunting as a food source. In figuring the numbers of game animals taken by hunters each year for food, the results are staggering. Cottontails alone account for sixty million pounds of food on America's table each year. This figure is based upon the forty million bunnies that are killed each year, each averaging 1.5 pounds of meat. Add to that figure the tens of millions of squirrels, pheasants, quail, grouse, hares, and doves taken each year for the table and the total becomes one of the largest in the world! Hunting is not just for recreation, but is a major source of meat and fowl for millions of Americans.

Although several million game animals are killed each year by arms which are either over- or underpowered for the species, most hunters who are experienced in the field do a fair job of matching the weapon to the game. There is still a lot of confusion in the outdoor world about what caliber, shot size, etc., to use on what game. This confusion is bound to continue as more Americans, born in the cities, turn to hunting. The next few pages will provide an introduction to the weapons and arms used for small-game hunting today. I won't attempt in this book to explore the various weapons in detail, but only to provide a basic introduction to modern small-game hunting arms.

THE SHOTGUN

I grew up with two guns. One was a shotgun, the other a .22 rimfire. When I went hunting I took my shotgun; when I went plinking I took my .22. It's the same today, although I use my .22 rimfire on more small game than I did as a youngster. The shotgun is a mildly forgiving weapon, although it still takes a certain amount of skill to hit the target and a great deal of skill to hit a flying target. The advantage of the shotgun is that it can be used on every game species found in North America as long as you have the right load.

The Break-Action Single Shot

The break-action single shot is the most popular choice for a youngster's first gun. The gun can be checked to see whether it is loaded or empty by breaking the action open.

The shotgun is the most versatile of all hunting arms.

COURTESY OF H&R

The H&R single-shot shotgun, model 490.

Exposed hammer of the H&R single-shot shotgun.

These guns are easy to handle, and weapons such as the H&R single shots are fairly inexpensive.

Most single shots have an exposed hammer, with the lever for opening the gun behind the hammer. By pushing the lever to one side, the gun unlocks and the breach is open for loading or unloading. There are also hidden hammer guns, which are more common today than ten years ago. However, for a person's first gun, the exposed hammer is much safer.

The Double-Barreled Shotgun

The double-barreled shotgun has retained its popularity with hunters for two important reasons. First, the double has twice the number of shots of the single. Secondly, it offers a great deal of flexibility in choke and barrel length and is safer than the other types of shotguns.

There are two basic designs of the double. One, and the most popular, is the side-by-side, in which the barrels are placed next to each other with the sighting taken down the space between the two barrels. The second is the over-and-under, in which the barrels are mounted one under the other. The over-and-under is popular for use on upland birds, while the side-by-side has proven itself on waterfowl. Both types of hunters have learned to make very effective use of the two barrels by having each barrel choked for a different pattern and then using the appropriate shot size and powder charge to produce the best possible results. This interchangeability of shot cannot be obtained with any other shotgun without making barrel changes.

Just as there are two barrel designs for the double, there are two trigger designs. The classic design has a single trigger with a button near the tang safety that allows the shooter to select which barrel (thus choke and shot size) to use as a first shot. The other single trigger design automatically fires one barrel and then the other the second time the trigger is pulled. There is a substantial savings when a single trigger *without* a selection lever is purchased.

The other trigger type is the dual trigger in which each trigger is set to fire one barrel only, and the shooter selects the trigger in the instant of firing. I've used the dual trigger double-barreled shotgun for years without mishap.

The Bolt-Action Shotgun

Next to the single shot, the bolt action is the slowest handling of all shotguns. I've missed a lot of birds on second shots because of the slowness of the bolt action.

Bolt-action shotguns are available with either tubular or box magazines. These guns are fairly inexpensive compared

Business end of an over-and-under double-barreled shotgun.

to all but the single shot and come in all gauges with a variety of chokes. Whereas the doubles are often very expensive and the single shot lacks the multiple-shot capability, the bolt-action shotgun is not expensive, offers more than one shot, and can be used on all types of game.

The Pump

Outside of the United States, it is sometimes difficult to find a pump shotgun. Yet in this country, the pump remains one of the most popular of all shotguns. Pumps allow the hunter to carry three to five rounds (or more, with a tube extender) depending on local laws, and they are nearly as fast-firing as the autos. Pumps are often less expensive than even medium-priced doubles, but are still fine-quality arms. Recent improvements in gun design, such as the Remington 870 Special Field, have made pump shotguns excellent all-around hunting arms.

The pump describes the action of the gun. The fore grip is pulled back to eject the spent shell and then pushed forward to chamber a fresh round. The same motion cocks the gun for the second shot. These guns are offered in all gauges and are so popular that many shooters buy a variety of barrels for their gun so that they can quickly switch from one choke to the next, depending on the species they are after.

The Autos

A hunter/shooter who can control the auto is deadly on small game. I've been with shooters who could put the first shot from an auto on target, but the next two shots went wild. My wife's uncle Bob is deadly with an auto-loading shotgun, shooting doubles and knocking down geese with ease. He is the exception rather than the rule.

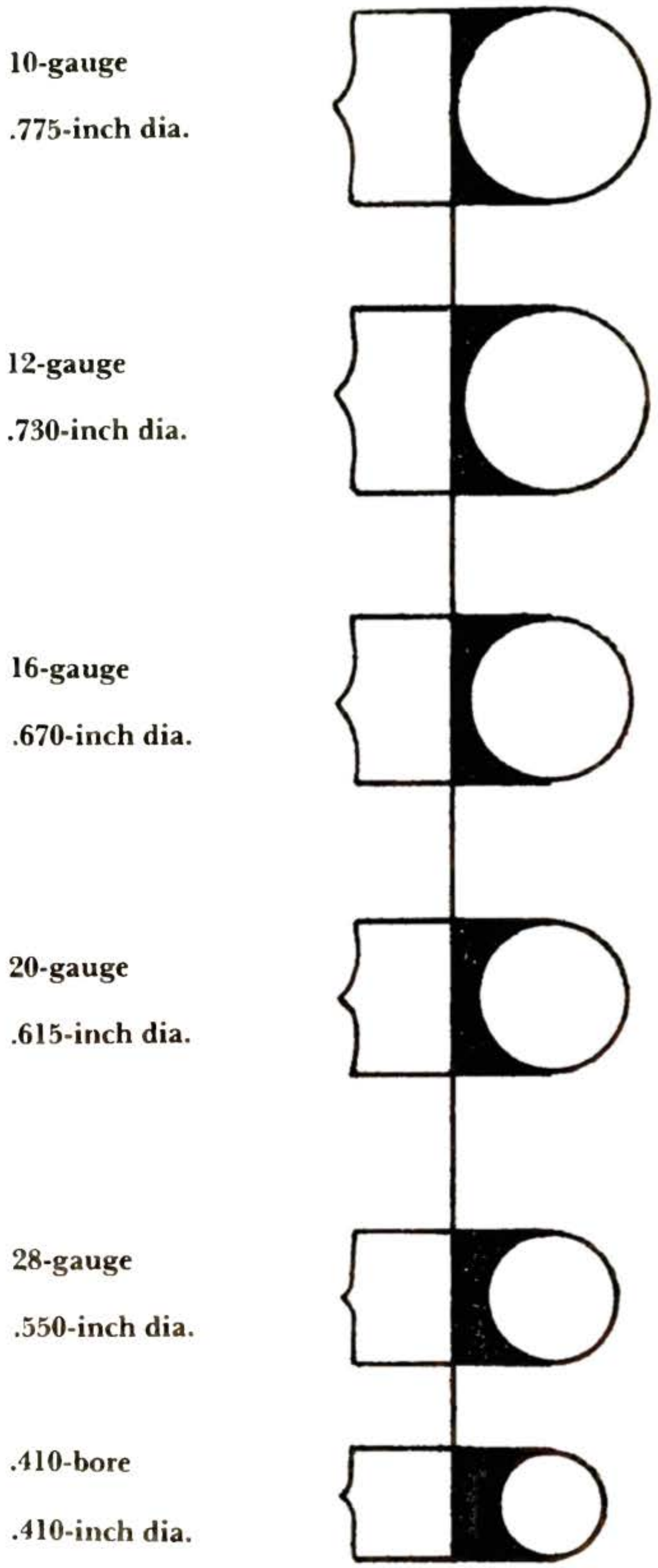
The autoloader in a shotgun is very hard to hold on target for the second and third shot, although the gun is doing the work for you by ejecting the round and chambering the second shell. There is a common tendency among shooters to "slap" the trigger on the second and third shots rather than using proper shooting techniques. Also, autos are picky about the ammo they will chamber. I've had autos that refused to chamber some ammunition because of slight bulges, while pumps handled the same ammo with ease.

The autos are also the most expensive of the repeating shotguns. However, if you have both the time and money to invest in a shotgun, the autos are faster firing than any other and effective on all types of game.

GAUGE

The most critical area in shotgun selection is gauge. You can spend a fortune on a fine side-by-side shotgun, but if the shotgun is either too big or too small for use on cottontails, it is no better than an expensive club. There are six gauges of

FIGURE 1. Relative Sizes of Shotgun Gauges
(shown in actual size with diameter given in inches)


10-gauge
.775-inch dia.
12-gauge
.730-inch dia.
16-gauge
.670-inch dia.
20-gauge
.615-inch dia.
28-gauge
.550-inch dia.
.410-bore
.410-inch dia.

modern shotguns: 10, 12, 16, 20, 28, and the .410 bore (the .410 is not a gauge, but a bore or caliber). All of these can be used on small game. However, the .410 and the 28-gauge are really too small except in the hands of experts, and the 10-gauge is really too big for anything except geese or turkeys. (See Figure 1 for the relative sizes of shotgun gauges.)

The 10-Gauge

There are few 10-gauge shotguns left around simply because they are too big for most small game. The advantage of the 10 is in the number of pellets thrown up at the target. A 12-gauge will throw up a pattern of 252 No. 4 pellets while a 10 will throw up 270 pellets of the same size. The density of the pattern is slightly increased at the longer ranges which accounts for the 10's popularity with dedicated goose hunters.

The 12-Gauge

The 12 may be the most versatile of all gauges. You can buy shot shells for any game animal in the country and match the loads to the game. There is no reason for going into the field with a 12-gauge that is not loaded with the proper ammunition.

Over the years, the belief that the 12 is too much gun for a woman has been disproven time and time again. Anyone who can handle a 20-gauge can handle a 12-gauge in light and medium loads. Although there might be some difference in larger loads, a little practice can take care of that problem as well.

The 20-Gauge

I spent an entire season with a 20-gauge pump and collected my limit on teal, rabbits, grouse, and other game. The gun is just as effective in most areas as the 12-gauge. The 20 is not, however, as effective on larger fowl such as geese and turkeys. Still, it does have the advantage of being lighter and smaller than the 12. Ammunition for a 20 is about the same as for the 12 so there is no cost savings in ammo. In areas where deer hunting is limited to shotguns, the purchase of a 20 for young members of the family for use on deer as well as small game is justified. The 20 offers every shot size from two to nine, plus slugs and buck in a wide variety of loads from field to magnum.

The 28- and 16-Gauges

There are still a few shooters around who use these "odd" gauges, although it is nearly impossible to find ammunition for the 28 and the 16 is quickly becoming a mantle-piece gun.

Although I grew up with a 16-gauge and my family killed several hundred ducks with our 16 pump, I would not buy one today because the difference between the 16 and the 12 is not enough to cause serious problems. Although the 16 is slightly larger than the 20, it has nearly the same kick as the 12 but lacks the punch to reach out for high-flying waterfowl. I mention this gauge because there are still quite a few of these guns around and some readers may be tempted to invest in a 16 rather than a 12. The difficulty in locating ammunition and the lack of a market to sell the gun should turn readers away from the 16 unless you are a collector and/or load your own ammunition.

The same set of reasons apply to the 28, and, in addition, the 28 is so much smaller that it falls into the experts-only grouping. Very few hunters have the skill to handle a 28 on moving small game. If there is difficulty finding shells for the 16, ammunition for the 28 is nearly impossible to find. The only shooter I know in my area who owns a 28 reloads his own ammunition and uses the gun only on specific small game because he is an excellent wing shot.

The .410 Bore

The .410 is nearly useless except for disposing of pests. The .410, unlike other shotguns, is not a forgiving gun. The shot pattern is too small for anything except bunnies and pests, and the gun's kick is strong enough to make it distasteful for small shooters. The .410 should only be used by expert shotgunners and even then only on easy-to-kill game such as squirrels and cottontails. This is not a good beginner's gun and is very limited in usefulness.

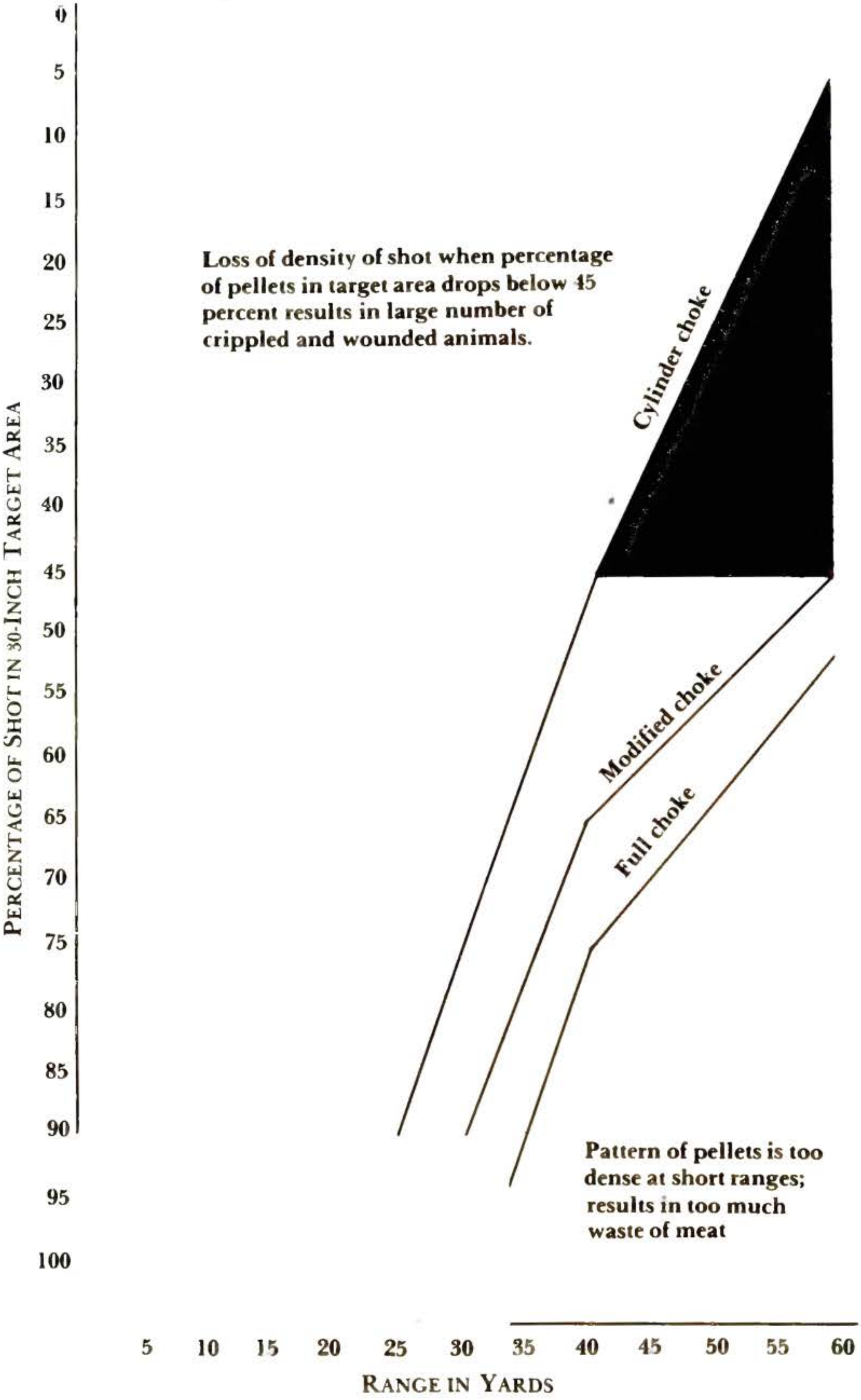
CHOKE

Nothing seems to stir up an argument faster than the function of the choke. It is the most misunderstood of all functions in shooting and is often quoted as the reason for a missed shot. There are seven chokes in use today: full choke, improved modified, modified, quarter choke, improved cylinder, skeet number two, and skeet number one. The only chokes that should be considered in hunting are: full, modified, and cylinder. All the other chokes are for very specialized shooting and have no place in the hunting field.

Choke is *not* the gradual tapering of the barrel of the shotgun from a point near the chamber to the muzzle. The choke of a shotgun is found in the last few inches of the barrel. Choke is simply the difference between the bore of the shotgun and the muzzle. A 12-gauge barrel measures .730 inches in diameter. If the choke is .035 inches at the muzzle, the choke is "full." A choke less than .035 inches indicates a wider opening or less choke.

The effect of the choke is to cause the shot, as it travels down the barrel and reaches the choke, to constrict much the same as water is constricted in a fire hose as it is pushed through the nozzle. Choke does not cause the shot to "cross" at a certain range nor to bounce as it leaves the barrel. The constriction of shot affects the spread of the shot pattern at a given range.

FIGURE 2. SPREAD OF SHOT OVER GIVEN RANGE BY CHOKE



Loss of density of shot when percentage of pellets in target area drops below 45 percent results in large number of crippled and wounded animals.

Pattern of pellets is too dense at short ranges; results in too much waste of meat

A full choke will put 70 to 80 percent of the pellets in a thirty-inch circle at forty yards. A modified choke will put 55 to 65 percent of the pellets in the same size circle at the same range, and a cylinder choke will put 45 to 50 percent of the pellets in the same circle at the same range. (See Figure 2 for the effect of choke on the spread of shot over a given range.)

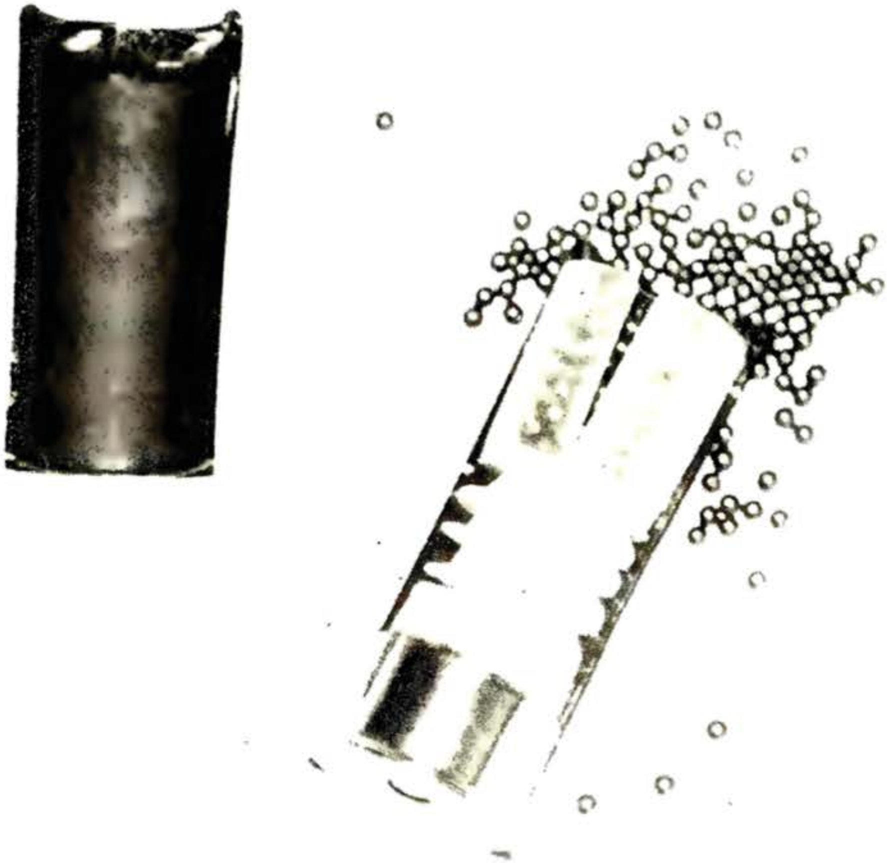
THE SHOTSHELL

Modern shotshells are marvels of engineering and have none of the problems that plagued hunters in the 1940s and earlier. When a hunter goes into the field with a box of modern shotshells, he is assured consistent shot-to-shot performance of the ammunition.

The shot charge of modern ammo is enclosed in a plastic sleeve. In the case of Remington-Peters RXP shells and others, the sleeve is also the wad. These wads and sleeves are made to protect the sealed gas chamber and to prevent deformed pellets (which produce spotty patterns) by absorbing the shock of firing, sealing the gas, and protecting the shot charge from contact with the shotgun's bore during the initial movement. Even those shells without the plastic sleeve around the shot have modern plastic wads to ensure a complete gas seal.

One of the more confusing numbers on a box of shotshells is the listing "Drams Equivalent." *This is not the amount of powder, but the amount of modern smokeless powder that equals the old black powder load.* The pressures and velocities of the days before modern powder are still the standards for shot charges, and the term "drams equivalent" is nothing more than a source of information for finding velocities and pressures.

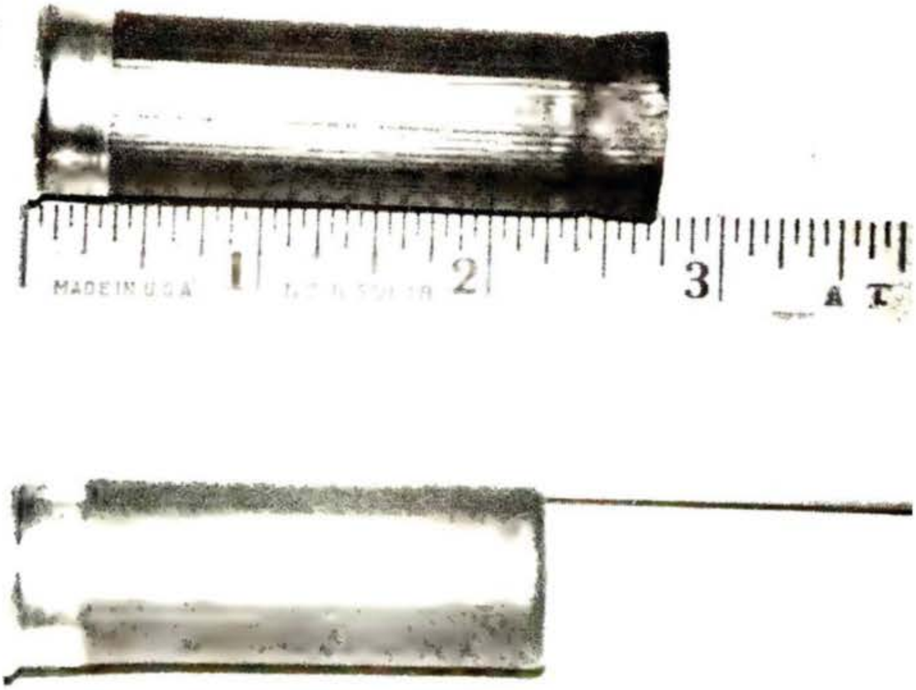
There is a very serious concern regarding shotgun ammunition. One must always be aware of cartridge length and



Shotshell with one-piece wad and shot sleeve.

chamber depth. There are two common shell lengths, and length of the shell determines which gun the shell may be used in. If a three-inch shell is placed in a gun chambered only for 2 3/4-inch shells, the result could be an exploded gun. This is because of the chambering. When a shotshell is fired, the crimp unfolds and extends the length of the shell. A 2 3/4-inch shell *before* firing is 2 1/2 inches long. *After* firing, the shell is 2 3/4 inches long. In a gun chambered for 2 3/4 inches, there is no problem. A three-inch shotshell is 2 3/4 inches long *before* firing; after firing the shell length is three inches. In a gun chambered only for 2 3/4-inch shells, the longer shell cannot unfold the crimp and the chamber

Relative sizes of shotshells. Far left is unfired, 3-inch shell; center is unfired, 2 3/4-inch shell; far right is fired 2 3/4-inch shell.



A fired 2 3/4-inch shotshell measures 2 3/4 inches.

will build up pressures greater than the gun was designed for. Because of this length confusion it is important to check the gun and know what shell length it will chamber. A gun chambered for three-inch shells will chamber both three-inch and 2 3/4-inch shells safely; a gun chambered for 2 3/4-inch shells will handle *only* the 2 3/4-inch shells.

Shot Sizes and Loads

In shotgun hunting, it is important to use the right shot size and load for the game hunted. There is quite a bit of confusion about field, game, long-range, magnum, and other loads. There is one hard rule of shotgunning that must be understood:

> The average velocity of a shotshell *at the muzzle* of a shotgun *is constant within a few feet per second* (fps) *regardless of the load.* The velocity of a shotshell's load of pellets will remain constant with other shells *firing the same size of pellets.* Only the density of the pattern will change enough to affect the killing potential of the pellet load.

The more powerful the shotshell, such as a magnum shell, the denser the pattern will remain over a given range, because of the increased number of pellets. The actual range of any shotgun is determined by the choke and the number of pellets fired. Too much powder charge in a shotshell, regardless of pellet size, will damage the pellets and reduce flight capability.

All of the advances of the past thirty years have been aimed at delivering more pellets into a thirty-inch circle at forty yards.

Pattern

Pattern is not where the gun shoots. Pattern is determined by the number of pellets found inside a thirty-inch circle at forty yards. Pattern is finally a function of choke. You must know the pattern of a shotgun to match the shotgun to the proper shot size/load. It is a truism in shotgunning that a shotgun that fires a perfect modified choke pattern with No. 4 shot may or may not fire an equal pattern with another size of shot. You should pattern every shotgun you buy to determine what it handles best.

Do not pattern a shotgun by firing into water or at a thirty-inch circle. To pattern a shotgun, fire it at a clean white sheet of paper that is at least 40 x 40 inches (60 x 60 is better). After the shot is fired, walk to the target and find the center of the densest area of shot holes. Using a pencil with a fifteen-inch string, draw a thirty-inch circle around that point. Then count the number of pellets *outside* the circle. Do this three times and then add the number of pellets together and divide by three to get the average number outside the circle. Once you have the average number of pellets outside the circle, divide this number by the number of pellets fired in a shell. (See Table 1 for approximate number of pellets per shotshell.) For example:

Shot no. 1:	34 pellets outside circle
Shot no. 2:	38 pellets outside circle
Shot no. 3:	36 pellets outside circle
Total:	108 pellets/3 = 36 pellets

Number of pellets in a shell = 203

36/203 = .18 or 18 percent outside the circle

To determine the percentage of pellets inside the circle, subtract 18 from 100 and change to percent: 100 - 18 = 82 or 82 percent. Now you know your gun is firing a pattern of 82 percent at forty yards and is therefore a full choke. (See

TABLE 1. APPROXIMATE NUMBER OF PELLETS PER SHOTSHELL BY WEIGHT

Oz. of Shot[1]	Common Shotshells[2] with Gauges Shown in Parens	Shot Sizes and Diameters (in inches)												
		#9	#8	#7½	#6	#5	#4	#2	BB	No. 4	No. 3	No. 1	0	00
		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
		.08	.09	.095	.11	.12	.13	.15	.18	.24	.25	.30	.32	.33
		Shot to Ounce								Buck to Pound				
		585	410	350	225	170	135	90	50	340	300	175	145	130
1 7/8	Field; Long Range; Magnum: BB, 2,4,5 (12); Heavy Magnum					318	252	168	93	40	36	21	19	15
1 5/8	Field; Long Range: 4 (10); Magnum: 2,4,6 (12); Heavy Magnum: 2,4 (12)				366	276	219	146	81	41	31	18	16	14
1 1/2	Field; Long Range; Magnum: 2,4, 5,6 (12); Heavy Magnum: 2,4 (12)			525	337	256	203	135	75	32	29	17	14	13
1 3/8	Field; Long Range; Magnum; Heavy Magnum		566	483	309	235	186	124	69	29	26	16	12	11
1 1/4	Field: 7½,8 (12); Long Range: BB, 2,4,5,6 (12) Magnum: 2,4,6,7½ (16,20); Heavy Magnum	731	513	438	281	213	169	113	63	27	24	14	11	10
1 3/16	Field; Long Range; Magnum; Heavy Magnum	696	488	416	268	202	160	107	60	25	23	13	10	9
1 1/8	Field: 4,6,7½,8,9 (12)(16); Long Range: 4,5,6, 7½ (16); Magnum: 4,6,7½ (20); Heavy Magnum	658	461	394	252	191	152	101	57	24	21	12	10	9
1	Field: 4,5,6,7½,8,9 (20); Long Range: 4,5,6,7½ (20); Magnum: Heavy Magnum	585	410	350	225	170	135	90	50	22	20	11	10	8
7/8	Field; Long Range; Magnum; Heavy Magnum	512	359	309	197	149	118	79	44	18	17	10	8	7
3/4	Field; Long Range: 6,7½,9 (28); Magnum; Heavy Magnum	439	307	263	169	128	101	68	38	16	14	8	7	6
1/2	Field; Long Range: 4,5,6,7½,9 (.410); Magnum; Heavy Magnum	293	205	175	113	85	68	45	25	10	9	6	5	4

[1] For 2-ounce loads, double the pellet number (10-gauge).

[2] If shot numbers are not indicated, the shells are not commercially available.

Table 2 for the standard number of pellets in a thirty-inch target area at forty yards by shot load.)

Shot String

As soon as shot leaves the muzzle, it begins to spread out. The circle of shot grows as dictated by the choke, and the column of shot begins to lengthen. Because no two pellets will travel at exactly the same speed, there will be a column of shot four to fifteen feet long. The effect on shooting is marginal at best. In a standard load of six shot with a muzzle velocity of 1050 fps at forty yards, the leading shot pellets will have a velocity of 635 fps and the trailing shot a velocity of 450+ fps. The time difference in arrival from the first to the last pellet in the string is only .025 seconds. In modern ammunition, 80 percent of the pellets are in the leading end of the shot string so there is very little effect of stringing in modern shotshells.

RIMFIRE RIFLES

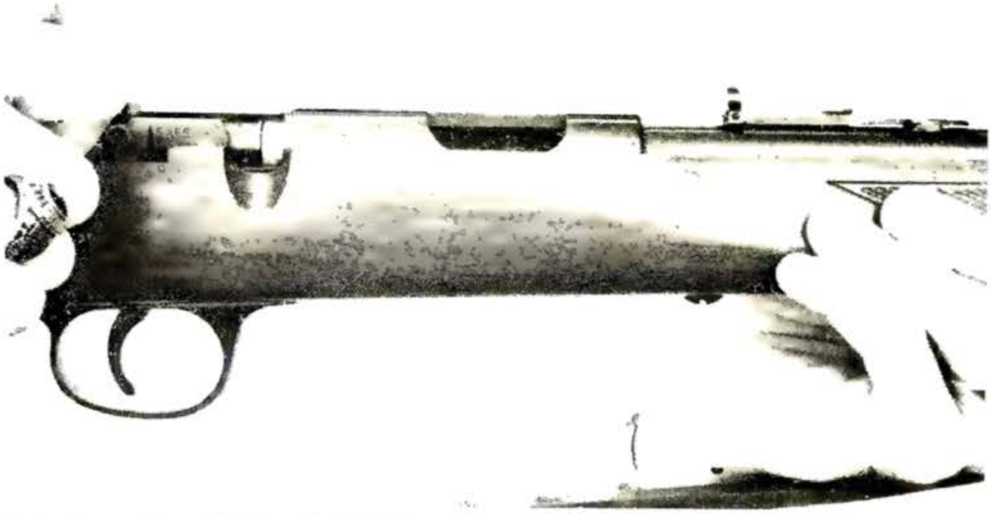
Rimfire rifles, in the .22 caliber, are excellent small-game weapons because they do very little damage to the meat and are accurate up to 100 yards for the average marksman. A .22 magnum in the hands of a skilled marksman is accurate out to 175 yards. The .22 is not just a plinking gun but an excellent hunting rifle and can be used on any game animal up to the size of a fox. The .22 magnum is an excellent coyote gun.

There are a variety of .22 rifles on the market starting with the single-shot bolt action. The single shot is not an inexpensive gun and there is very little demand for it today. However, there are a few of these guns still being manufactured. The Marlin Glenfield, for example, is capable of handling ammo from .22 shorts to .22 long rifle.

TABLE 2. Number of Pellets in 30-Inch Area at 40-Yards by Shot Load

		Shot Size							
Oz Shot	Choke	#9	#8	#7½	#6	#5	#4	#2	BB
1 7/8	Full 70-80%					254	202	134	74
	Modified 55-65%					207	164	109	60
	Cylinder 45-50%					159	126	84	47
1 5/8	Full 70-80%				293	221	175	117	65
	Modified 55-65%				238	179	142	95	53
	Cylinder 45-50%				183	138	110	73	41
1 1/2	Full 70-80%			420	270	205	162	108	60
	Modifed 55-65%			341	219	166	132	88	49
	Cylinder 45-50%			263	169	103	102	68	38
1 3/8	Full 70-80%		453	386	247	118	149	99	55
	Modified 55-65%		368	314	201	153	121	81	45
	Cylinder 45-50%		283	242	155	118	93	62	35
1 1/4	Full 70-80%	585	410	350	225	170	135	90	50
	Modified 55-65%	475	335	285	183	138	110	73	41
	Cylinder 45-50%	366	257	219	141	107	85	57	32
1 3/16	Full 70-80%	556	390	333	214	162	128	86	48
	Modified 55-65%	452	317	270	174	131	104	70	39
	Cylinder 45-50%	348	244	208	134	101	80	54	30
1 1/8	Full 70-80%	526	369	315	202	153	122	81	46
	Modified 55-65%	428	300	256	164	124	99	66	37
	Cylinder 45-50%	329	231	197	126	96	76	51	29
1	Full 70-80%	468	328	280	180	136	108	72	40
	Modified 55-65%	380	267	228	146	111	88	59	33
	Cylinder 45-50%	293	205	175	113	85	68	45	25
7/8	Full 70-80%	410	287	247	158	119	94	63	35
	Modified 55-65%	332	233	201	128	97	77	51	29
	Cylinder 45-50%	256	180	155	99	75	59	40	22
3/4	Full 70-80%	351	246	210	135	102	81	54	30
	Modified 55-65%	285	200	171	110	83	66	44	25
	Cylinder 45-50%	220	154	132	85	64	51	34	19
1/2	Full 70-80%	234	164	140	90	68	54	36	20
	Modified 55-65%	190	133	114	73	55	44	29	16
	Cylinder 45-50%	147	103	88	57	43	34	23	13

NOTE: Use this chart with Table 1 (showing the number of pellets per shotshell by weight) to determine how many pellets of the load that you are shooting actually hit the target area in a correctly firing gun. If your gun shoots a higher or lower number of pellets, the choke is different than labeled.



A bolt-action .22 rimfire rifle.

COURTESY OF H&R

The H&R bolt-action single-shot .22 rimfire. Very few single shots are still being manufactured.

All of the rifle styles on the market are found in the .22 rifle. Selecting one for hunting is based more on what a person is comfortable with than any other factor. For long-range varmint shooting, a .22 magnum in a bolt-action is my favorite. Accurate out to 200 yards, this rifle has proved the undoing of a number of prairie dogs and other varmints.

My other hunting arm in a .22 is the Ruger 10/22. This short carbine with its rotary magazine has killed dozens and dozens of cottontails for me at ranges from ten to fifty yards. The lever-action .22 rifle is popular because of its classic styling and handling, while the .22 pump has been largely ignored by the hunting public. The only .22 configuration that I don't like is the .22/.410 combination. Other combi-

A lever-action .22 rimfire rifle.

A pump-action .22 rimfire rifle.

nations, such as the .22/20-gauge or even .22 magnum/20 gauge, are useful in the mountains for hunting blue grouse and snowshoe hares at the same time.

Author with small game taken with an H&R .22 rimfire revolver.

.22 Ammunition

More important to the hunter than gun action is ammo selection. Small-game animals up to the size of cottontails and squirrels can be easily taken with any of the .22 rimfire ammunition on the market, including the little .22 BB caps. For larger game, however, the ammunition should be limited to .22 long rifle or .22 magnum only.

Also manufactured in .22 rimfire are .22 shotshells. These are excellent in the back country for killing snakes but otherwise are of little use, and should never be used to hunt small game except for sparrows or other barnyard pests.

HANDGUNS

Handgun hunting is a growing sport in this country. It is exciting and offers a challenge to the hunter, although it is not a very reliable way to put meat on the table. Since I frequently carry a .22 revolver with me while big-game hunting, I often use it to collect small game for the camp stew pot.

Unlike big-game hunting which has severe limits on the caliber and type of handgun, with small game anything goes. I've killed rabbits with my Ruger Mark I automatic pistol, with my H&R .22 revolver, and even my H&R .32 magnum. The choice is up to you as a hunter. Just be prepared to miss more often than you would with a rifle or shotgun.

AIR GUNS

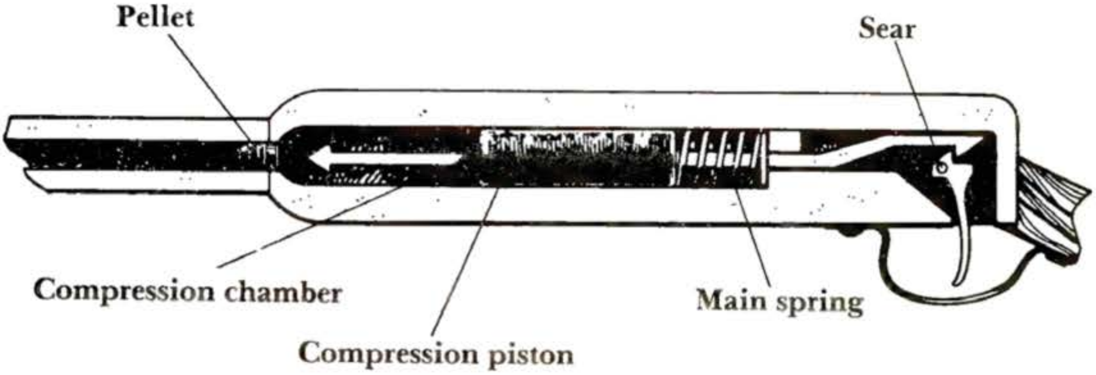
When I first began hunting with air guns, it was for an article assignment from *Survive* magazine to field-test air guns as possible survival arms. Since that article, I've spent quite a bit of time in the field hunting with air guns, and my support of them for hunting has grown steadily.

Air guns are not substitutes for firearms. Modern high-velocity air guns are quite capable of killing small-game animals up to jackrabbit size at the same range most hunters would use their .22 rifles. A bonus for air-gun hunting is the savings in ammo costs and the fact that air guns can be used in areas near towns where firearms would be dangerous.

There are three types of air guns on the market. The most powerful is the spring-piston gun, which should not be confused with a BB gun although the two arms appear to operate in the same manner. The spring-piston gun is much more powerful. Spring-piston air guns, such as the Beeman R1, are very heavy and accurate, capable of killing jackrabbits out to forty yards.

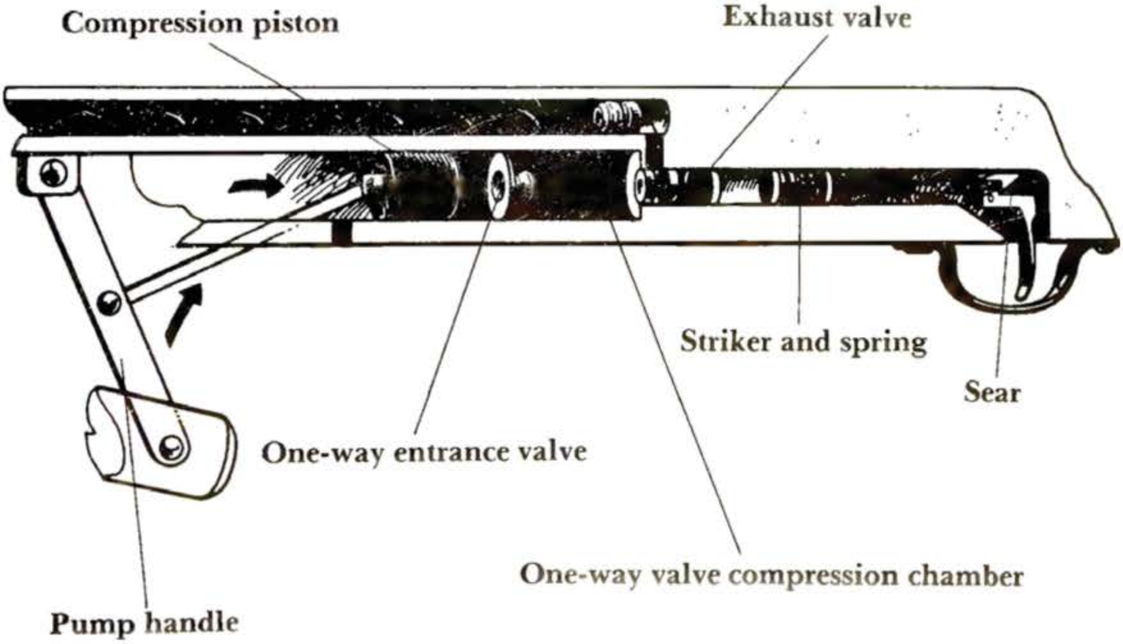
While a spring-piston air gun operates by a single cocking stroke (Figure 3), the pump or pneumatic guns, such as the Crosman Model 1, operate by pumping air into a reservoir where it is stored until needed for firing (Figure 4). The CO_2 guns operate in a similar manner although the stored CO_2 is

FIGURE 3. THE SPRING-PISTON AIR GUN


Pellet
Sear
Compression chamber
Main spring
Compression piston

This drawing reveals the simplicity of the spring-piston air gun.

FIGURE 4. THE PUMP AIR GUN


Compression piston
Exhaust valve
Striker and spring
Sear
One-way entrance valve
One-way valve compression chamber
Pump handle

In the CO_2 gun, the compression piston, one-way valve, and pump handle are replaced by the CO_2 supply. The striker and exhaust valve are similar. Both the pneumatic and CO_2 guns require a complex valve system which, if it breaks down in the field, can make the gun useless.

Author with cottontail killed with a pellet from a Beeman R1 air rifle.

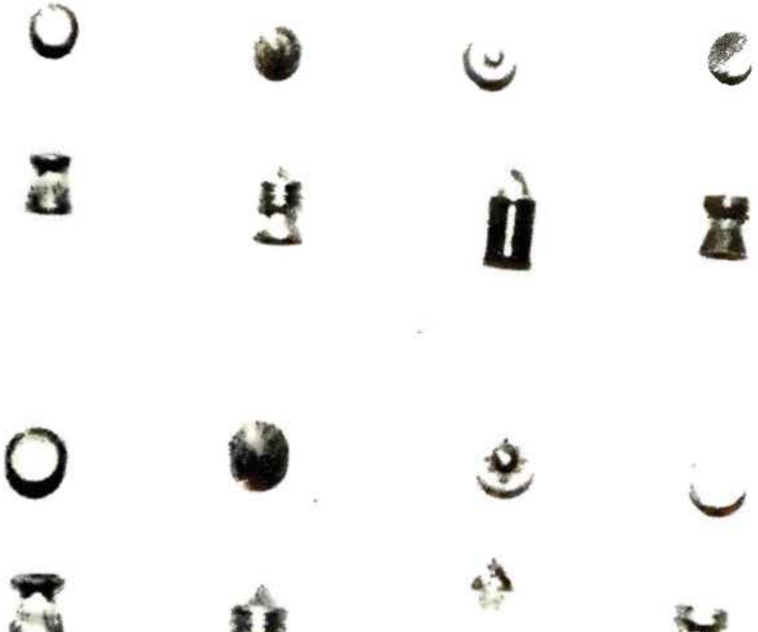
in a cartridge and is released into the reservoir with each shot.

Of the three types of air guns, the spring-piston is the most powerful and accurate for hunting, followed by the pump and then the CO_2. In all cases, care should be taken to ensure the minimum velocity of the air gun is no less than 400 fps for hunting small game. Scopes enable the shooter to place the pellet accurately for a quick kill, which is important because of the lower velocity of air guns. Both Beeman and Bushnell manufacture excellent air-gun scopes, which can be zeroed for hunting.

Pellet Sizes and Types

There are three standard sizes of pellets in this country. These are the .177, .20, and .22 caliber pellets. The .177 and

The Crosman .357 CO_2 air pistol. Because this pistol can be loaded with pointed pellets and plastic-skirt pellets, it can be used on small game at ranges up to 10 to 15 yards.



Pellet designs. Top row is .177 caliber; bottom row is .22 caliber. From left to right: wadcutter, pointed, plastic skirt with round point, flat.

.22 calibers are most common and are stocked by chain stores and sporting goods stores around the country. Both the .177 and .22 calibers are effective on small game and can easily kill a rabbit or squirrel. The .22 pellets, when fired at velocities of 850 fps or higher, can be used on game up to fifteen pounds. (For more information on pellet performance, see Figures 5 and 6 and Tables 3 and 4).

Pellets are sold in several shapes, including flat-nosed, wadcutter, pointed, round-nosed, and semi-wadcutter hollow-pointed. For hunting pellets, I would use either pointed or semi-wadcutter hollow-point pellets, leaving the flat and round pellets for target shooting only.

A note about airguns for hunting. Although lead pellets are lethal on game, BB guns are seldom lethal, but are quite capable of injuring a rabbit, causing it to die later. BB guns are not hunting arms and should not be considered as such.

VARMINT GUNS

Small-game hunting requires small guns, but there are a group of centerfire weapons used in small-game hunting. These are varmint rifles and handguns. These guns are designed for flat shooting at ranges over 250 yards and are often fired at targets that cannot be seen without a spotting scope.

Varmint hunting has a huge following in this country and, while I hunt many varmints with my .22 magnum, most "true varmint hunters" would turn their nose up at such a light weapon—with good reason. There is no way I could hope to equal their shooting with my .22 mag! There is a wide variety of calibers, weapons, and ammunition designed specifically for varmint shooting. Anyone who is thinking of taking up the sport should spend at least one season in the field with a dedicated varmint shooter, learning about the calibers, guns, and specialized equipment.

FIGURE 5. RETAINED PELLET VELOCITIES OVER GIVEN RANGE

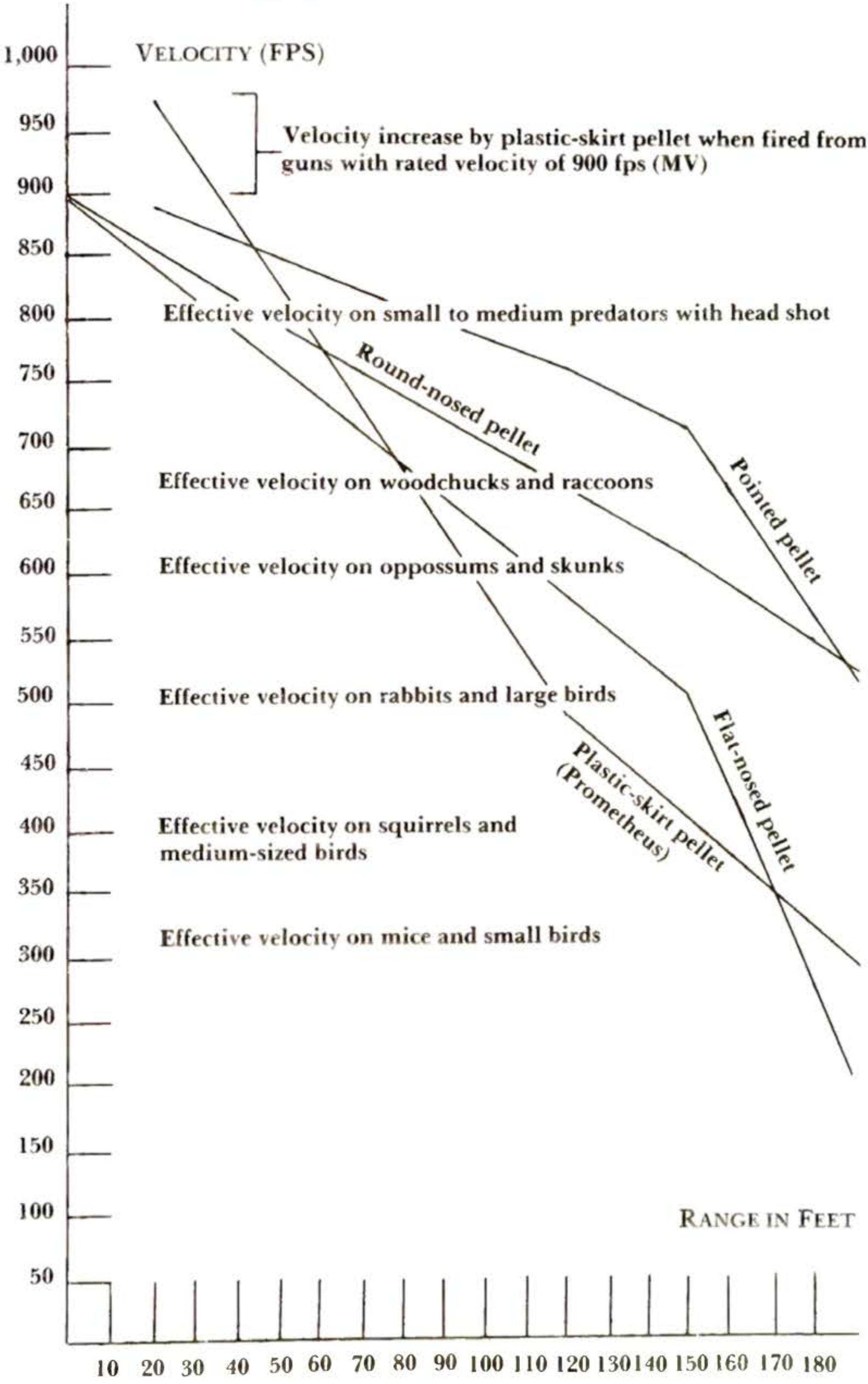


FIGURE 6. TARGET CLAY PENETRATION OF PELLETS BY DESIGN

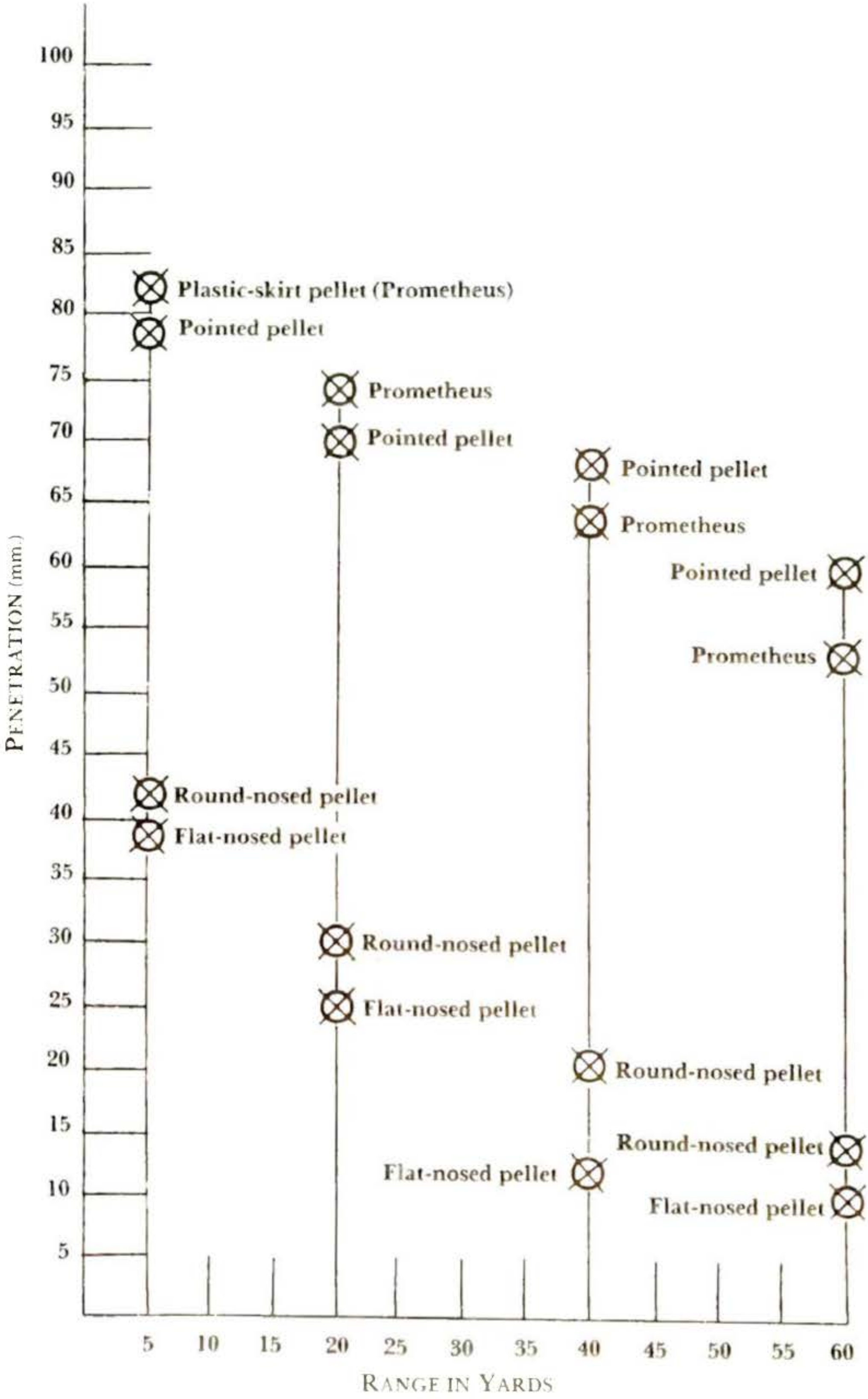


TABLE 3. ACCURACY OF PELLETS BY SHAPE (group size in inches)

PELLET TYPE	RANGE IN YARDS 10	20	30	40	50	60
Pointed Pellet	.15	.25	.28	.30	.50	.75
Round-Nosed Pellet	.18	.28	.33	.50	.80	.90
Flat-Nosed Pellet	.18	.30	.50	.75	1.00	1.25
Plastic-Skirt Pellet (Prometheus)	.25	.33	.50	.85	1.25	1.50

TABLE 4. ENERGY OF PELLETS (in foot-pounds)

PELLET STYLE/WEIGHT	400 fps	VELOCITY 600 fps	900 fps
Pointed Pellet			
.177 Caliber 8.3 grains	4.79	8.49	14.93
.22 Caliber 15.4 grains	8.80	15.73	27.71
Round-Nosed Pellet			
.177 Caliber 7.7 grains	4.45	7.87	13.85
.22 Caliber 14.3 grains	8.26	14.61	25.73
Flat-Nosed Pellet			
.177 Caliber 8.5 grains	4.91	8.68	15.29
.22 Caliber 13.9 grains	8.03	14.20	25.01
Plastic-Skirt Pellet (Prometheus)			
.177 Caliber 6.1 grains	2.17	4.88	10.97
(Steel Core 5.2 grains)	(1.85)	(4.16)	(9.36)
.22 Caliber 9.1 grains	5.25	9.30	16.37
(Steel Core 7.9 grains)	(4.56)	(8.07)	(14.21)

MUZZLE-LOADING FIREARMS

Another fast-growing sport is muzzle loading. For years, muzzle loaders were limited to big game because they were too big for small-game hunting. The notable exception was the muzzle-loading shotgun. Today, however, there are a number of excellent replica arms in the smaller calibers of .32, .36, and .40 which are excellent small-game firearms.

Like archery, muzzle loading for small game takes quite a bit of practice. A person who is thinking of taking up muzzle loading for big game would be wise to try it out on small game with a smaller caliber first.

ARCHERY

Whenever we think of archery hunting, we tend to think in terms of big game. Actually, archery hunting for small game is a popular sport with growing numbers of followers. It is a great means of getting in shape for the big-game season and does put a fair amount of meat on the table.

The development of adjustable bow weights has made the practice of hunting small game with a bow more practical. Now it is possible to "crank down" a bow from the big-game weight of sixty pounds or more to a more reasonable small-game weight of forty-five to fifty-five pounds. I use my Golden Eagle Mark IV hunting bow on rabbits whenever there is enough snow on the ground to make tracking possible. In hunting small game with a bow, it is a good idea to leave the expensive hunting arrows at home and take to the field with less expensive arrows since arrows are often damaged by ground-level shots.

Flu-flus are arrows with oversized fletching on them. They are used by bird hunters to slow the arrow rapidly and thus prevent lost arrows. For the same reason, flu-flus are also useful in squirrel hunting. For most of my small-game hunt-

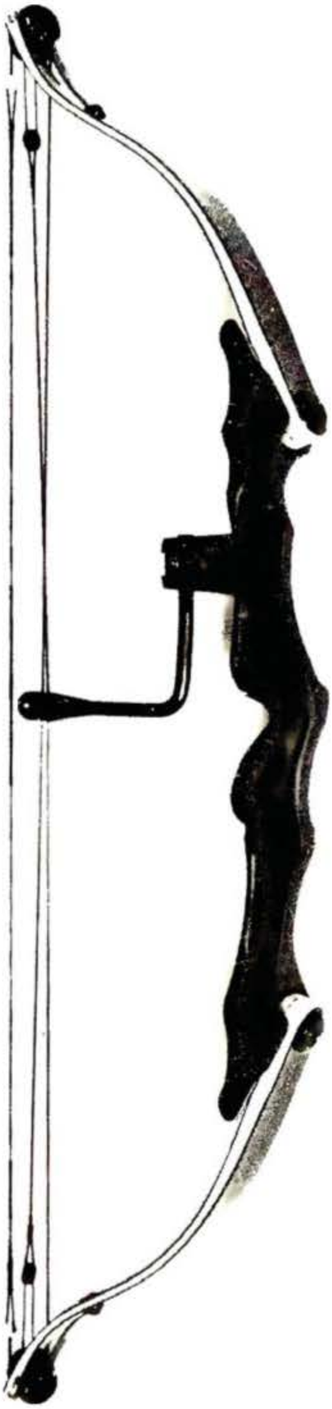


PHOTO COURTESY OF GOLDEN EAGLE ARCHERY

The Golden Eagle Mark IV hunting bow can be used on both large and small game.

PHOTO COURTESY OF HANK ROBERTS, INC.

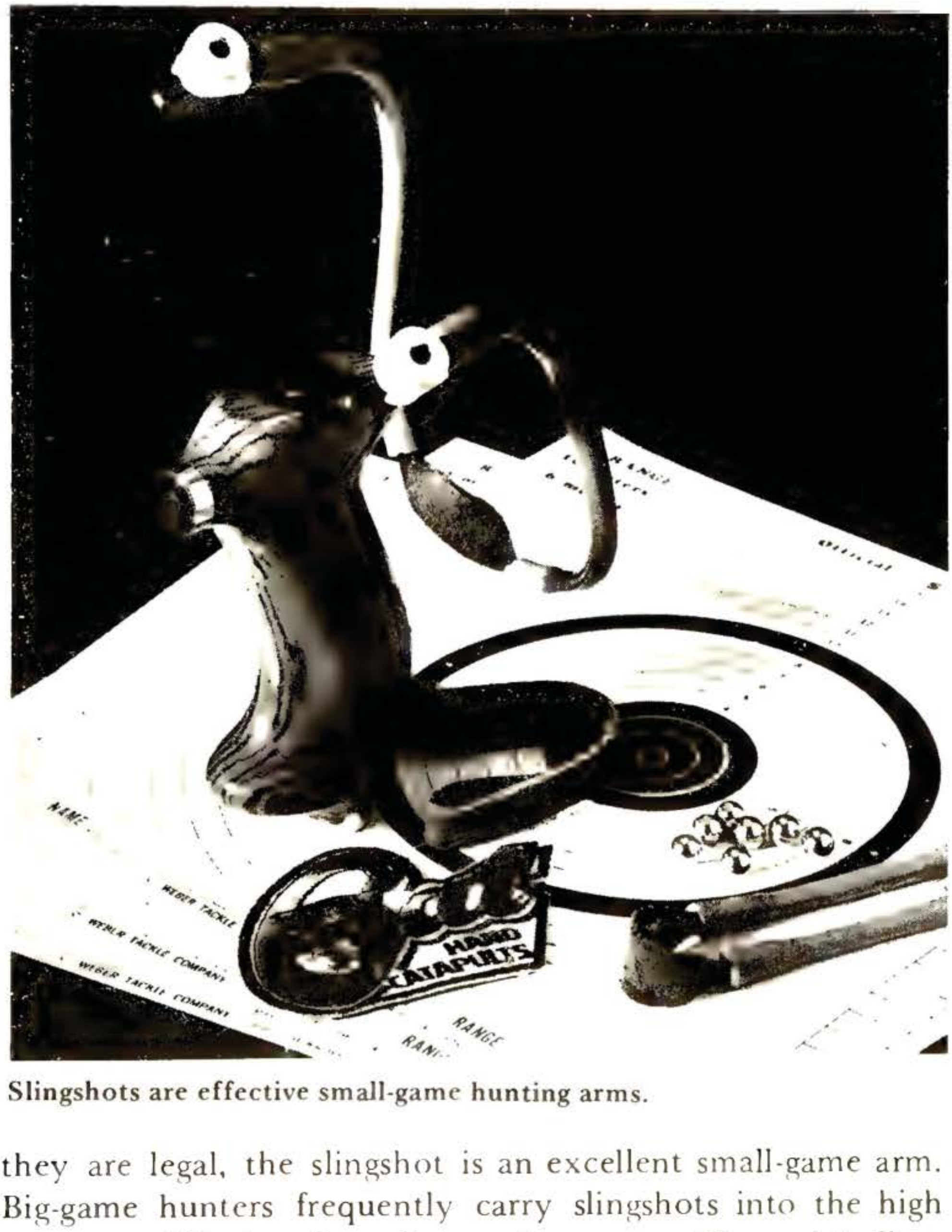
The Hank Roberts Magnum crossbow; one of the better quality hunting crossbows on the market.

ing, I use blunt-tip arrows on anything up to the size of a cottontail and field points on jackrabbits or hares. For predators, I use hunting broadheads, which I also use on deer, and take care to ensure they are razor sharp.

Although crossbows are not considered archery in many states, the number of states where crossbows are legal for hunting is growing rapidly. A crossbow for small-game hunting should fire at least a fourteen-inch arrow and have a draw weight of no less than 125 pounds. A crossbow is no more effective than a hand bow for hunting, and the ranges are nearly the same. Crossbow hunting should be taken up as a "fun sport" rather than as a means of seriously providing meat for the table. Like the hand-bow arrows, crossbow arrows are easily damaged hunting small game.

SLINGSHOTS

The first rabbit I killed was with a slingshot. The problem with these weapons has been (and remains) errant boys who, armed with slingshots, target windows, cars, headlights, streetlights, etc. In some states, slingshots are illegal. Where


NAME
WEBER TACKLE
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RANGE
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PHOTO COURTESY OF WEBER INTERNATIONAL CATAPULTS

Slingshots are effective small-game hunting arms.

they are legal, the slingshot is an excellent small-game arm. Big-game hunters frequently carry slingshots into the high country while hunting elk or other game. The quiet slingshots can be used to pot grouse or hares without having to fire a shot and spook the game.

Ammunition for slingshots can be rocks, marbles, or even the lead balls used in muzzle loaders. Since a slingshot can be bought for less than ten dollars and a fine-quality hunting slingshot costs no more than forty dollars, they are excellent choices for big-game hunters who want a light and quiet weapon for small game.

OTHER ARMS

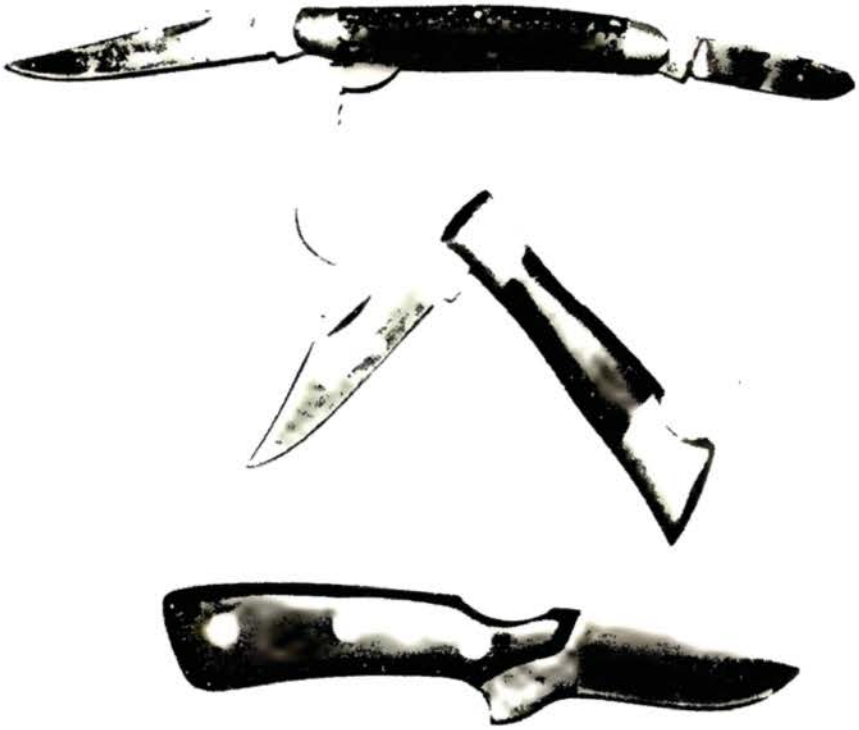
As I pointed out earlier, anything that can be shot or thrown has been used to bring down game. Blowguns are popular in some areas, and some people like to hunt with spears or knives. I don't support these alternate weapons for hunting small game because most people do not have the time to devote to mastering the techniques. The weapons I have covered in this chapter have proven to be both effective and humane. Hunting, as a sport, is under enough attack from the antihunting faction that it does not need the added bad publicity of injuring animals with blowguns or other unusual weapons.

HUNTING AIDS

From clothing to Jeeps, there are hundreds of aids or gadgets on the market for the avid hunter. Some are useful, but others are designed simply to attract the hunter's pocketbook.

First-aid kits are important. I always carry two kits, one in my Jeep and the other in my belt pack or butt pack. I have used these kits for everything from removing splinters to saving a horse with a serious cut from barbed wire (nothing says they have to be used on people!). My first-aid kit includes a bandage that can be applied to a bullet wound (at least 2" x 2") plus an assortment of Band-Aids, tweezers, tape, and gauze. The first-aid kit in my Jeep is larger and can be used to treat more serious wounds.

Whenever I am headed for the mountains to hunt grouse or hares, I carry a compact survival kit that will get me through



Three types of knives for small game: the three-blade pocketknife, folding lockback knife, and standard skinning knife.

twenty-four hours in the high country. For trips closer to home, I put the kit in my Jeep.

Knives are very important for all hunters, and I carry two. One is a large survival knife that I keep sharp. While I don't carry this knife if I am going two miles out of town to hunt bunnies, I do carry it on any trip that might leave me in the remote country overnight. The other knife is a lockback knife, which I use for cleaning game. Since I always clean my game in the field before bringing it home, this knife is kept sharp. In my Jeep is a small whetstone, just in case.

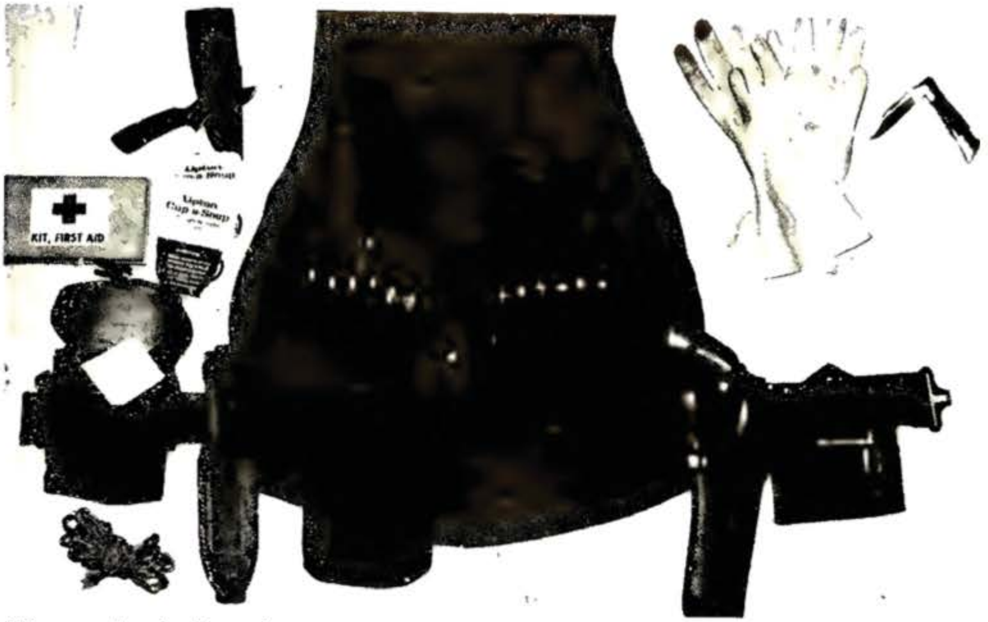
Wire, such as baling wire, is useful for tying game to a tree or bumper for cleaning. A roll of wire carried in the trunk or under the seat can be used for other emergencies as well. A small roll of wire costs less than five dollars and will last for several years.

The blood of all wild animals carries a number of viruses, but there is no excuse for a hunter coming down with rabbit fever today. A pair of rubber kitchen gloves (or surgical gloves) makes the job of cleaning game easier and safer. I carry two pairs, one in my pack and another pair for friends in the glove box.

A short length of cotton cord or rope (about four feet) is handy for carrying animals. All small-game animals carry ticks and fleas. As the animal cools, the fleas and ticks look for a new host. If you are carrying the animal in your hand or in a game pouch on your shooting vest, they will migrate to your body. Some of these fleas carry the plague and are deadly. Don't take a chance. For furred animals such as rabbits and squirrels, tie the rope to their legs and carry them on the rope. Birds should be carried either by a rope or one of the bird carriers sold in sporting goods stores. The game bag may look traditional, but it is not safe.

I've had a lot of people look at me funny because I carry a pair of binoculars in my pocket when hunting small game. I not only use them to scan rocks for rabbits, trees for squirrels, and fields for running pheasants, but I've enjoyed watching deer, elk, and other animals from a distance. The pair I most often carry are Bausch & Lomb 7x24 Armored Discover Binoculars. Any good, quality pair that will fit in your pocket can be used, although they should be fogproof and waterproof.

A hunting vest is a sort of traditional item. For waterfowl hunting, a good canvas vest is a great investment. For most other hunting, it is too heavy and hot. Vests, whether made from mesh, cotton, or canvas, should have pockets for spent shells and loops for holding extra ammo and should be fairly quiet. Nylon shooting vests are noisy and snag easily. When you buy a vest, remember that you will wear it on the out-



The author's hunting vest with a pistol belt. A hunting vest should have loops for extra ammunition and pockets for empties. Game should be carried on a small length of cord or rope and not in the game pocket.

side of your other clothing. I've got a vest that fits just right over a T-shirt but is too small over my hunting coat.

Hunting pants should not be jeans. In foul weather, jeans do not hold in body heat, nor do they keep out stinging nettles, cactus, or other thorns. They also snag easily. The best hunting clothes are wool for winter and other heavy materials for the other seasons. They should always have extra knee, butt, and pocket space. Although as a youngster, I used to chuckle at the hunters who were "decked out," once I discovered why they wear the traditional clothing my chuckling stopped. A good pair of hunting pants is an investment that will last for many years and make the sport a lot more comfortable.

The last items in the way of clothing are, of course, boots. Good hunting boots are not hard to find. The sporting goods stores are full of them. They should be waterproof, warm, flexible, and most of all offer some protection from cactus thorns and snakes.

Each form of small-game hunting has a selection of little extras for that sport. These extras are just that, extras, yet many of them are now "traditional." They have a purpose, which is to make the sport safer and more enjoyable. There are decoys, calls, camouflage gear, and much, much more.

As the sport grows and changes from the pressures of a growing population and shrinking wildlands, there will be more "goodies" added. The actual hunting techniques will change as animals retreat further into the wild and become more adept at hiding and avoiding people.

More dangerous to hunting's future is the unchecked development of wildlands for ski areas, houses, parking lots, etc. Because of this development, it is essential that hunters take responsibility for the future of wild game. As hunters, our first responsibility is to protect wild animals so future generations can enjoy the sport of hunting. It is up to us as hunters to ensure that the wild turkey, fox squirrel, and cottontail will be here fifty years from now. Anything less than a sporting approach to hunting endangers not only the sport of hunting but the future of wildlife and even the right to own firearms. Every bullet hole in a road sign from a frustrated hunter who missed a grouse or turkey is another bullet hole closer to the end of our great hunting tradition.

2.

GAME HANDLING

"First get me a rabbit!" I am sure everyone has heard the story about how to make rabbit stew—you start with a rabbit. True enough! Getting the rabbit *is* the first step, but all too often the second and third steps are skipped, and the result is something less than what it could have been. Proper handling of game animals in the field can result in a more enjoyable meal once you have your game home. Poor field handling can result in very poor eating.

All game animals, from dove to big game, should be treated with tender loving care from the minute you pick them up. The one hard rule about handling wild game in the field is to cool the animal as quickly as possible in order to prevent the meat from spoiling or taking on a flavor from internal fluid leakage. Shot holes from any type of weapon used to kill the animal will puncture several of the animal's organs, tubes, etc. The fluids released will quickly send their foul taste throughout the meat of the animal, thereby spoiling it.

In some cases, such as with cottontails, the quicker the animal is gutted, the more tender it will be when cooked. I've tried the following several times with rabbits shot in the head: one rabbit I would leave "whole" with the entrails intact for two or three hours, and the other I would field dress as soon as I killed it. The field-dressed rabbit was not only sweeter, but also more tender.

Although field dressing of all game is important, a second step is seasoning the game. All wild game benefits from seasoning. Some hunters hang their fowl until the tail feathers pull free with only a slight tug. This works to an extent. However, in warm weather and in warmer parts of the country, your meat could spoil or become infested with maggots in a very short time. One of the safest and best ways to season all wild game animals is to hang them in an old refrigerator kept in a garage or basement for that purpose. Adjust the controls so the temperature is 40° F. and no lower than 35° F. Remove the inside shelves and replace them with wooden dowels. When you have game to season, hang the bird or animal from the dowels by either the hind legs or feet (on birds), using cotton string to tie the animal in place. You should allow ample room around each bird or animal for air to circulate. Place an open box of baking soda in the bottom of the compartment to absorb odors from the game during the aging process. Consult the "Seasoning Chart" for the length of time each species should be seasoned.

After field dressing your game in the field, you should carry all furred animals with a rope to prevent fleas and other parasites from migrating from the dead animal to your own body. After field dressing, birds can be carried in a game bag on the back of your vest for a short time. In warm weather such as dove season, it is a good idea to keep a cooler with ice in your car or truck. After shooting half a dozen birds, transfer them to the ice chest rather than leaving them in the open or carrying them around in your game bag.

Although all game birds should be field dressed as soon as possible, there may be times when you do not want to remove the entrails and organs until after the bird has been weighed. (Turkey is one bird that is commonly weighed before cleaning.) If you plan to keep the bird intact for weighing or mounting, place it in a plastic bag and ice it down as soon as possible. This procedure does nothing for

SEASONING CHART FOR SMALL GAME

All game should be clean and the body cavity washed out. Birds are seasoned with the feathers and skin on. Furred small game are seasoned after skinning. Be sure the internal cavity is clean on all animals. You can use the refrigerator for seasoning if you don't have an old refrigerator converted to a seasoning box. Simply wrap the bird or animal in plain brown paper and place it in the refrigerator. In a seasoning box, birds should be hung by the feet, animals by the hind legs. The seasoning temperature for all of these species should be 35 to 40°F.

SPECIES	MINIMUM TIME (hours)	MAXIMUM TIME (hours)
Cottontails	12	48
Hares	24	72
Raccoons	24	72
Opossums	24	72
Dove	24	24
Quail	24	36
Ptarmigan	24	36
Grouse	24	48
Partridge	24	48
Wild turkeys	24	96
Ducks (small)	24	48
Ducks (large)	24	72
Geese	24	72
Ring-necked pheasant	24	72

the flavor but will help preserve the bird's weight or size if you intend to mount it.

If you can't get a bird or small animal to a taxidermist for some time, the best way to handle the animal is to first wash away all bloodstains before they have a chance to set and then dry the feathers or fur. Carefully fold the wings of the bird into place and then wrap it with plastic and freeze flat. Never wrap any game animal or bird intended for mounting with newspapers since the ink will come off on the fur or feathers. For furred animals intended for mounting, after washing and drying the fur, carefully comb out any dirt, leaves, or other matter in the fur. Fold the legs into natural positions; then wrap the animal and freeze it flat.

I do not advise anyone who is not trained in taxidermy to attempt to skin a bird or small animal for the taxidermist. It can be done, but the taxidermist uses the body of the original animal to help plan the form the skin will be placed over for the finished mount. If you must skin the animal for the taxidermist, place the bird or animal on its back and spread its wings and/or legs. Push the fur or feathers back to expose the skin in a straight line from the anal opening to the lower end of the breastbone. With a *very sharp* knife, cut along this line. Cut only the skin and do not penetrate the thin membrane protecting the internal organs. Use your fingers to slowly peel the skin away from the animal, using the knife where necessary to cut the membrane.

For the tail, cut the tail muscles and backbone immediately behind the vent, but do not cut the flesh holding the tail in place. On the legs, as you remove the skin, work the leg up through the skin. Leave the lower portion of the leg intact and do not attempt to skin it. Cut the leg at the knee joint.

Do not attempt to skin the head, but remove the skin very carefully from the neck and then cut the head free at the base of the skull. Use your knife and fingers to remove the brain and other flesh in the skull.

For wings, push only the first section of wing free of the skin and leave the rest intact, cutting the wing at the first joint.

After skinning, return the skin to its original position and rub it with dry cornmeal or flour to soak up any blood. If several days elapse before you can get the skin to the taxidermist, the skin should be salted and allowed to dry or frozen if possible.

The skinning process is long and involved and requires careful attention to detail. You are far better off putting your birds or animals on ice, even overnight, than trying to skin the animal yourself.

If you are intending to sell a pelt to a fur buyer, handle the animal in the field much as you would for the taxidermist. An important consideration here is that any damage to the pelt will lower its value. Any animal killed for its pelt should be shot cleanly so that it does not bleed. Most hunters who fur hunt opt for a neck or head shot; the single shot to the head is most effective. A shot to the body will result in blood damage to the fur.

As soon as the animal is killed, it should be washed clean of blood. If you plan to be in the area for several hours, you will have to skin the animal right away to prevent hair slip. After skinning, the hide should be covered with meal to absorb any blood.

If you plan to take the entire animal home and skin it there, wrap it either in cheesecloth or an old sheet to protect it from dirt, rocks, or anything else that might damage the fur. Never carry a furred animal in the trunk of your car where it might be exposed to oil stains or jostled by tools. Spread a plastic sheet on your car's backseat to protect the seats from staining. Two dollars for a plastic sheet is a good investment when an oil stain could cost you fifty dollars or more.

Field handling of birds and animals destined for the stew pot is a little different than for the taxidermist or fur buyer. As noted previously, the rule is to cool the animal as quickly as possible. Each type of bird or animal requires only a slight variation in handling to preserve the quality of its meat.

RABBITS

Cottontails are the easiest to field dress of all game. As soon as you make your kill, use a sharp knife to cut the body cavity open from the area just below the breastbone to the anal opening and then dump the entrails and organs. If you want to save the heart and liver, place them in a small plastic bag. Whether you save them or not, check the liver for any sign of disease. White spots on the liver or other signs of disease should prompt you to discard the entire rabbit.

A no-mess method of field dressing a rabbit is to squeeze the insides toward the rear of the rabbit with two hands. Spread your legs a shoulder-width apart and, while still holding the rabbit with both hands, raise it over your head and bring your arms down sharply, stopping with your elbows on your thighs. The force of the blow will cause the guts of the rabbit to fly free of its body through a tear near the anal opening. You can then pick out the liver and heart from the pile of waste and check the liver for disease.

Either method will help the rabbit cool quickly. To carry the rabbit, run a stick through the lower part of the back legs and tie the stick to a rope. Either carry the rope or tie it to your belt. Do not put the rabbit in a game bag since any fleas it might have will migrate from the cooling rabbit to your body.

After the day's hunt is over, I like to skin the rabbits at my truck by hanging the bunnies from the bumper by their hind legs. All you need to do to start the skinning process is pinch the skin near the joint on the hind legs and tear it down. As soon as you have the skin started, continue to peel the rabbit down to the head and then pull the head off. After skinning, I drop the rabbit into a plastic bag and start on another. The entire process takes less than two minutes per cottontail.

JACKS AND HARES

Both jackrabbits and hares require a little more effort to clean than do rabbits. I gut both jacks and snowshoes as soon as I kill them, and whenever possible I hang them on a bush to drain. I then tie a rope to the animal for carrying. Once my hunting day is over, I skin the animals back at my vehicle. Although you can peel the skin from hares, the skin is tougher than a jack's and takes longer to get off.

SQUIRRELS

Cleaning squirrels can be a mess or quite simple. The safest and fastest way to clean a squirrel is to make a slit in the skin near the tail. Work your fingers under the skin and expose the tailbone. After cutting the tailbone free, I continue to work the skin down the body, using my knife only where the skin sticks to the body. The skin will usually break near the joints of the leg so I cut the leg off at this point. After skinning, I cut the membrane holding the internal organs in place and dump them out.

In some cases, it is easier to simply gut the squirrel by cutting from the anal opening to the rib cage and dumping the contents. Then tie the squirrel to a rope and carry it the same way as you would a rabbit. Either method will ensure that the animal cools quickly.

Once you have your squirrel, rabbit, or hare home, you should thoroughly wash the animal and dry it. If there appears to be quite a bit of blood still in the meat, you can remove it by soaking the meat in a large pan of cold water with a tablespoon of salt per animal dissolved in the water. Although this is one of the oldest methods for handling small game, it works. I usually soak all my squirrels and rabbits overnight in salt water and then remove them and pat them dry. Then I wrap the animal for freezing and pop it in the freezer. To freeze small game, you don't need to freeze it in water but you should wrap it *tightly* with a clinging plastic wrap, being careful to make sure there are no holes in the plastic. I wrap the animal in butcher paper or newspaper over the plastic wrap, taking care to note that it is sealed. Use a felt pen to write the contents on the package and the date the game was killed. Later, as I use up the wild game, I remove the oldest animals first.

Both rabbits and squirrels can be hung for seasoning, which makes the meat more tender. The meat will dry out, however, if you hang the animals after skinning. If you plan to hang a small game animal, leave the skin on the animal and hang it for twenty-four hours in the cooler. Then skin it. You will find, however, that the skin will not peel away as easily as it does when the animal is freshly killed.

Regardless of the method used to season and clean the meat of small-game animals, you can quickly ruin the meat if you freeze it in a way that allows air to reach the meat. To save room in the freezer, I always cut the animal into six pieces before freezing. If you prefer your meat in stews, you can bone the animal before freezing for even more compact storage.

SMALL GAME BIRDS

Small game birds such as quail and dove are among the most abused of all game animals in the field. Most hunters simply leave the birds intact and slip them into their game bag. A friend of mine, Bob Poos, a well-known writer and former editor of *Soldier of Fortune* magazine, taught me a quick method of cleaning these birds at home, and from that I developed a way of ensuring that the birds cool quickly in the field and do not spoil. I carry a pair of scissors with me in the field and as soon as I knock down a small game bird, I snip the tail off above the anal opening. I squeeze out the internal organs and collect the heart, liver, and gizzard, which I drop into a small plastic bag. With the internal organs gone, the bird will cool rapidly even if carried in a game bag.

Once the hunt is over, I return to my vehicle where I have a pail and five gallons of water waiting. I spread the birds out and pick them clean while holding them underwater in the pail. The feathers float on the water, and I can scoop them out to drop in a trash bag. I use the scissors to clip off the neck, wings, and legs. After cleaning, drop the birds in a plastic bag.

I clean my small birds in the field because I don't want the mess around the house, but you can use the same method at home. If you want to season the birds before cleaning, wash the body cavity out after removing all the innards. Hang the birds by their necks in your cooler for a few hours to allow any water and blood to drain away. Complete the seasoning process by hanging the birds from their feet in order to allow air to circulate around the wings.

You can season field-cleaned birds by placing two birds in a small paper bag about the size of a lunch bag. I stack the bagged birds in the cooler and fold the sacks shut so the air will not ruin the meat. None of the small-game birds requires more than twenty-four hours of seasoning before being packaged for the freezer or readied for the table.

To freeze these birds, you can use either the water method or the wet-towel method. For water freezing, simply drop two or three of the birds into a half-gallon or quart milk container and fill with water. Close the container and freeze. The water prevents air from drying out the meat. My method is slightly different. I wrap each bird individually in a paper towel and hold it under running water to soak the paper towel. I make sure the entire bird is covered with the wet towel and then slip it into a freezer bag, two birds to a bag, and tie it shut. The water in the paper towel freezes, forming a coating of ice over the bird. I have yet to lose a single bird to freezer burn with this method and I've frozen everything from doves to geese in this manner.

MEDIUM-SIZE BIRDS

Grouse, pheasant, and smaller waterfowl should be gutted in the field as soon as possible so they will cool. I use a sharp knife, in this case my small Crosman pocketknife, and carefully make a slit from the anal opening to the breast. I dump the entrails and organs, saving the heart, liver, and gizzard. I use dry grass or leaves to swab out the body cavity and then carry the bird for thirty minutes tied to my belt with a piece of rope. This allows it to drain and cool before moving it to my game bag. If the bird is to be mounted, don't gut it but put it in a plastic bag and into the cooler as soon as possible.

These larger game birds should be allowed to season for twenty-four to forty-eight hours before being picked or skinned. If you intend to cook the bird, picking is far superior to skinning. The skin of the bird will prevent it from drying out if you roast it, and the skin also contains most of what little fat is found on wild game birds.

As soon as you arrive home with your game bird, wash the body cavity out with cold water and then hang it by the neck overnight to drain. The next morning, turn the birds upside down and let them hang from the feet to complete the seasoning process. Hanging any bird up to the size of a grouse any longer than forty-eight hours risks ruining the flavor of the bird. The only exception is if you plan to cook the bird as soon as the seasoning is completed. In that case, I would let it hang an additional twenty-four hours. The reason for this is that when you freeze game for later use, the meat continues to break down in the freezer, although at a much slower rate. A month in the freezer is equal to about eight hours of hanging. I've eaten fowl that I've kept in the freezer up to a year frozen in paper towels and it was just as good as a bird hung for three days and roasted.

Any of the upland game birds can be picked in the cold-water bath I described for cleaning small birds and the mess held down to a manageable amount. There are two methods for picking waterfowl. For the wax method, melt enough wax to fill a three-quart container or full-gallon container and then dip the bird in the melted wax. Let the wax cool and then peel the wax and feathers away. After picking each bird, the wax can be reused by melting it and scooping the feathers out. The other method is to cold-pick the bird after hanging it for forty-eight hours. Do not use boiling water to scald the bird. The boiling water breaks down the oils in the skin and gives the bird a gamey taste.

If you cold-pick rather than wax, you will find a lot of pin feathers left. The traditional method for removing these is to light a newspaper roll and burn off the pin feathers. This procedure is fine except that the newspaper ink contains a lot of chemicals that get on the meat. A small propane torch, found in hardware stores and used for soldering, works better than any other tool for burning off the pin feathers without having the flame touch the meat. All you need to do is wave the flame a few inches from the bird and the feathers will melt away. By far, however, the best method for picking any game bird is melted wax.

LARGE BIRDS

The large birds, such as geese and turkey, are handled the same way as grouse-sized birds with one exception. The turkey trophy, the fan-shaped tail, can be ruined by improper handling. Most of us want to weigh the turkey before doing any cleaning so we wait until we get the bird home to start the process. This is fine if home is less than an hour away. If we wait too long, the tail will fall apart and, moreover, the internal juices of the bird can work their way into the meat and ruin its taste. To avoid ruining the meat, if the time between killing the bird and weighing it will be several hours, carry a plastic bag with you and place the internal organs in it.

To preserve the tail for mounting, after getting your turkey home, if it is a tom, carefully cut away the patch of skin on the breast where the beard is. Then cut the tail away by skinning the bird around the tail. Be sure that when you cut the tail, you take enough flesh to hold the tail in place until you can get it to the taxidermist. After removing the tail and beard, wash out the body cavity with water and hang it the same way you would grouse-sized birds.

After the body cavity has drained, hang the bird for seasoning, allowing twenty-four hours per five pounds of bird dressed. A ten-pounder should hang two days, a fourteen-pounder, three days. I use the same rule for geese and handle them in the same way as I do my turkeys. Both geese and turkeys should be cold-picked or cleaned with wax, not scalded.

A NOTE ON COOKING

Wild birds have big breasts and small legs. The breast and legs won't cook at the same rate of speed if it is a good-sized goose, duck, grouse, or dove. If you cook the bird whole, the legs will dry out before the breast is done. I've licked this problem two ways. On birds to be cooked whole, I wrap the wing tips and legs with cheesecloth and when I baste the bird, I give the cheesecloth a good soaking of juices.

The other method I use is to precook the wild birds in boiling water with a chopped onion for several minutes, long enough to heat them through to the bone. I then bone the bird and cut the meat into cubes for stew or any recipe calling for small chunks of meat. Either method will produce mouth-watering results in the kitchen.

3.

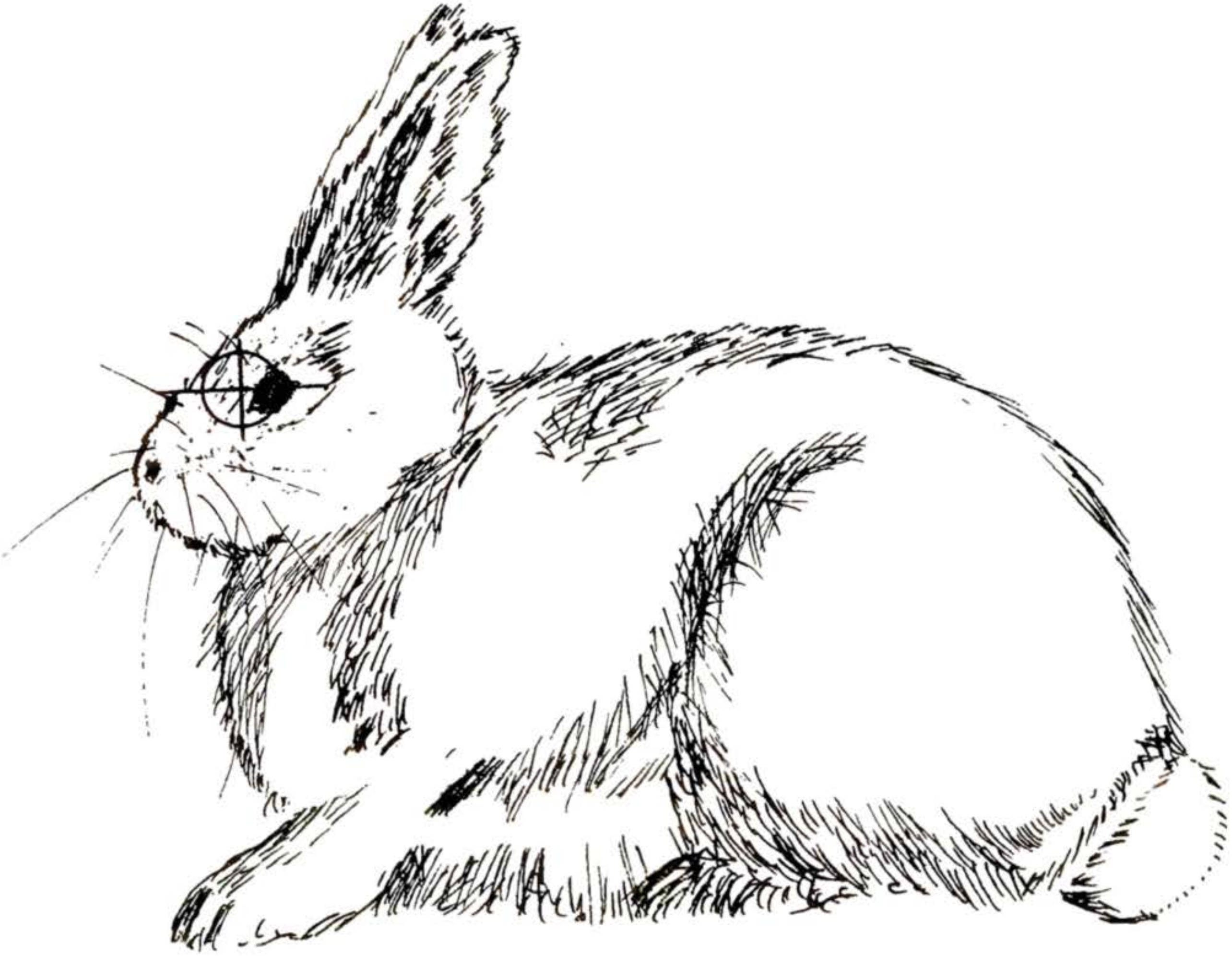
RABBITS AND HARES

A step closer and the small pile of brush explodes into a streak of grey and brown that zigzags for a few yards searching for an escape route and becomes a speeding ball of fur. You have to wonder how such a small critter can move so fast!

If everything is going right, the hunter's gun is raised, a lead taken, and the shot explodes. The rabbit tumbles end over end and slides to a stop. Another fine meal is that much closer to the table. Of course, if it worked like that every time, those firms cranking out millions of shotgun shells every year would be hard-pressed to stay in business. The bottom line is that even the very best "rabbit shot" misses a few from time to time. We can live with that fact a little more easily, however, because there are enough rabbits on the range that anyone who hunts them, even on the most casual basis, has a good chance of collecting a few bunnies.

However, more than one hunter has returned home after a day in "prime rabbit country" with an empty game bag. It wasn't very long ago that a hunter friend of mine complained that he had spent the better part of a Saturday morning tramping through rabbit country without seeing a single cottontail.

"I don't understand it," he said, "there were rabbit trails all over the place and enough droppings to build a bonfire. I didn't see one rabbit all morning!"



When using a rifle, aim for the point right in front of the cottontail's eye for a quick kill without damage to the meat.

I really wasn't surprised. This hunter had started hunting more than thirty years ago and hadn't changed his methods much over the years. I knew the rabbits were there because the previous weekend I'd been in the same area and bagged three cottontails with my Ruger 10/22. I'll admit I had to work for those rabbits, but by taking a slightly different approach to hunting, I did see quite a few targets. Although rabbits are not gifted with a lot of brainpower, they have adapted to growing hunter pressure. As funny as it might seem, rabbits have become "hunter wise" and are rapidly becoming experts at avoiding men with guns. I've watched rabbits sneak away from hunters by crawling with ears lowered along a small depression in the ground until they could bolt for the safety of a hole.

There is an area near my home covering some fifty acres that is a combination of rocks, low-growing shrubs, and various grasses. The area is full of rabbits. I've been in the area with my wife and while we fished, we have seen as many as a dozen rabbits around the rocks. Although there might be ten other people in the area, the rabbits are not the least worried. To test the rabbits, I've walked toward them with empty hands and they hop out of my path without panic and go on about their business. If I walked toward them carrying a stick as if it were a shotgun or rifle, the rabbits knocked each other over trying to escape. Nature, it seems, has impressed on the small brain of the rabbit that a man with a gun is bad news. I've learned that if you are willing to change your methods, you will stand a much better chance of collecting your game.

An important asset to any hunter is knowing the game he is after. There are four major groups of rabbits in this country with more than two dozen subspecies. The four groups are cottontails, swamp and marsh rabbits, brush rabbits, and pygmy rabbits. Each one of these has a slightly different life pattern and habitat. One species may overlap into

COMMON OR EASTERN COTTONTAIL

Description: Length: 15–19 in. Weight: 2–3 lbs.
Coloration: *Body sides* and *front* and *back legs:* brown with grey. *Back:* brown. *Belly, chest, rump,* and *underfur:* grey. *Tail:* grey with white under tail.

Distribution: All areas east of the Rocky Mountains from Canada to Mexico.

Preferred Habitat: Not a forest animal but is found on the edge of any forest area or other land that allows safe movement from cover to feeding areas. Edge may be a fence row or old farm home site.

Table Fare: Excellent

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Remarks (shot size/load)
Handguns or Rifles					
.22 Short		☐			handgun
.22 Long		☐			handgun
.22 Long Rifle	☐				scoped rifle
.22 Magnum	☐				scoped rifle
Centerfire		☐			with scope for long ranges
Air Gun	☐				
Shotguns					
10-gauge				☐	
12-gauge	☐				5 or 6 shot; 2½–3¼ drams equiv..
16-gauge	☐				same
28-gauge	☐				same
20-gauge	☐				same
.410			☐		
Archery	☐				
Crossbow	☐				
Slingshot		☐			
Other	☐☐			☐	☐☐ Trapping ☐ Blowgun

another group's domain, but only for a limited distance.

There are at least a dozen different species of cottontails and thirty to forty lesser variations. The hunter could care less about all of these family groups unless he is an amateur wildlife biologist. The most common of all the rabbits is the common cottontail or eastern cottontail. This rabbit's range is bordered by the East coast from Florida up through New York, west around the Great Lakes and along the Canadian border to North Dakota, then south to Texas, taking in the better half of New Mexico and much of Mexico.

Although the cottontail is widespread, it is not a forest rabbit. The cottontail sticks to the brush country and, like other members of its tribe, prefers the "edge" country whenever possible. In the case of the common cottontail, this edge can be anything from a dry creek bottom where various shrubs have taken root to the edges formed by fence rows. One of the most common areas to look for these rabbits is on any piece of land that once had a farmhouse, barn, outbuildings, etc. The soil is often fertile and has a number of shrubs growing on it, as well as a healthy population of grasses. The edge is formed where the old building sites are edged by the fields or pastures.

To locate cottontails, first locate an edge. The edge will be nothing more than the border between one type of cover and another. The edge may be formed by a fence, creek bed, or growth of shrubs. Usually the edge will be between dense growth and more open growth. The dense growth provides the cottontails with safety areas, and the more open areas are feeding grounds. If you are searching an area for the first time, walk along the edge and note the number of trails leading from the light area to the dense area. The rabbits won't go very far into the dense cover, only far enough to hide and feel safe.

When you are ready to hunt the area, it is best to have two hunters working together. One hunter goes into the thick

NEW ENGLAND COTTONTAIL

DESCRIPTION: Length: 15–19 in. Weight: 2–3 lbs.
Coloration: *Body sides* and *front* and *back legs:* brown with grey. *Back:* brown. *Belly, chest, rump,* and *underfur:* grey. *Tail:* grey with white under tail.

DISTRIBUTION: New England states south through the Appalachian Mountains.

PREFERRED HABITAT: Same edge country as common cottontail although more often appearing on edges of hardwood forest.

TABLE FARE: Excellent

	EXCELLENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR	REMARKS (shot size/load)
HANDGUNS OR RIFLES					
.22 Short		☐			handgun
.22 Long		☐			handgun
.22 Long Rifle	☐				handgun and rifle with open sights or scope
.22 Magnum	☐				handgun and rifle with open sights or scope
Centerfire				☐	
Air Gun	☐				
SHOTGUNS					
10-gauge				☐	
12-gauge	☐				5 or 6 shot; 2½–3¼ drams equiv.
16-gauge	☐				same
28-gauge	☐				same
20-gauge	☐				same
.410		☐			
Archery	☐				
Crossbow	☐				
Slingshot		☐			
Other		☐☐		☐	☐☐ Trapping ☐ Blowgun

cover as far as the maintained rabbit trails go and walks about ten yards ahead of the second hunter, who is following the edge. The cottontail will often stay put while the first hunter sneaks along the trail toward the open area. But the second hunter is too much for the bunny's nerves, and it races from the thick cover to the edge. It will often turn to run ahead of the hunter at full speed and then dart back into the thick stuff, circling behind both hunters. The trick is to move very slowly and keep alert for the exploding ball of fur.

The New England cottontail is a variation of the common, or eastern, cottontail and is also an edge creature. The ranges of the two bunnies overlap somewhat, and the methods of hunting them are the same.

DESERT COTTONTAIL AND MOUNTAIN COTTONTAIL

Throughout America's West, two major species of rabbits are hunted: the desert cottontail and the mountain cottontail. The ranges of these two rabbits overlap in many areas of the West, and it is not uncommon to find a mixture of these rabbits when you are hunting the lower elevations of the mountains. Since both of these rabbit types are edge creatures just as their eastern cousins, they are hunted in overlapping habitats in the same manner. In the mountains or arid desert, the edge country becomes limited and your hunting tactics must switch to be successful.

I've had my most successful hunts for mountain cottontails by first locating southern exposures that are "edged." These rabbits seek edges formed by the middle growth between the pines of the mountains and the arid areas of the exposed valley. Along these southern exposures, the trees are mixed juniper stands with oak brush thickets. Scattered along the face of the mountains are jumbles of rocks. The rabbits have everything they need for survival. The low plants and

DESERT COTTONTAIL

Description: Length: 15–19 in. Weight: 2–3 lbs.
Coloration: *Body sides, front* and *back legs,* and *back:* brown with buffed grey. *Belly, chest, rump,* and *underfur:* grey. *Tail:* white under tail.

Distribution: Arid areas of Rocky Mountains and further west.

Preferred habitat: Arid and semiarid parts of the country where the prickly pear and various types of thornbush are found. Also commonly found near dry creek bottoms where brush grows along the sides.

Table fare: Good; best-tasting cottontails have a variety of foods to feed on.

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Remarks (shot size/load)
Handguns or Rifles					
.22 Short			☐		
.22 Long			☐		
.22 Long Rifle	☐				
.22 Magnum	☐				
Centerfire				☐	
Air Gun		☐			
Shotguns					
10-gauge				☐	5 or 6 shot; 2½–3¼ drams equiv.
12-gauge	☐				same
16-gauge	☐				same
28-gauge	☐				same
20-gauge	☐				same
.410			☐		
Archery		☐			
Crossbow		☐			
Slingshot				☐	
Other				☐	

MOUNTAIN COTTONTAIL

DESCRIPTION: Length: 15-19 in. Weight: 2-3 lbs.
Coloration: *Body sides* and *front* and *back legs:* brown with grey. *Back:* brown. *Belly, chest, rump,* and *underfur:* grey. *Tail:* grey with white under tail.

DISTRIBUTION: Mountain areas of the West.

PREFERRED HABITAT: Brush slopes of the mountains where rocky edges meet brush and pinyon country.

TABLE FARE: Excellent

	EXCELLENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR	REMARKS (shot size/load)
HANDGUNS OR RIFLES					
.22 Short		☐			handgun
.22 Long		☐			handgun
.22 Long Rifle	☐				with scope
.22 Magnum	☐				with scope
Centerfire		☐			with scope
Air Gun	☐				
SHOTGUNS					
10-gauge				☐	5 or 6 shot; 2½-3¼ drams equiv.
12-gauge	☐				same
16-gauge	☐				same
28-gauge	☐				same
20-gauge	☐				same
.410		☐			
Archery			☐		
Crossbow		☐			
Slingshot			☐		
Other				☐	

shrubs provide food, the rocks provide protection from predators, the juniper trees provide shade from the hot sun, and when it is cold, the rabbits can sun themselves on the exposed rocks.

In hot afternoons, I hunt in the juniper country, working my way slowly along the slope and looking under each tree's lower branches for a sitting cottontail. These rabbits know they are exposed to danger as soon as they leave the protection of the tree, and they will sit perfectly still waiting for you to walk by. It is not uncommon to be within five or ten yards when you spot the sitting bunny, so a .22 rimfire or high-velocity air gun is the ideal weapon.

Later in the season, I switch my tactics when hunting mountain cottontails, hunting them on the rocks. The rabbits will sun themselves in the open and have learned that if they sit perfectly still, hunters will pass them by. Or, if a hunter seems too close, the rabbits only have to move a few feet to find protection in the rocks. For this type of hunting, I move very slowly along the rocks and actually use a pair of binoculars (Bausch & Lomb's 7 x 24 armored binoculars) to scan the rocks ahead of me. I scan the rocks fifty to seventy-five yards ahead of me and if I spot a rabbit on the rocks, I move to a good position and use my scoped .22 rimfire to take the rabbit.

A very successful variation of this method is for two hunters to work the rocks. One hunter takes up the highest position he can on the rocks, and the second hunter moves very slowly along the base of the rocks. If the rabbits don't feel any pressure, they will often hop toward safety, staying several yards in front of the moving hunter. Usually, it is the high hunter who gets the shots.

The desert cottontail is a slightly different rabbit. Where the mountain cottontail will expose himself on the rocks, the desert cottontail lives in patches of cover where you wouldn't think there were any rabbits. I've kicked desert cottontails out of low-growing clumps of weeds and out of the center of prickly pear clumps. One of my favorite areas in Colorado to hunt desert cottontails is a dry valley between half a dozen tabletop mesas. Dry creek beds crisscross the valley and the land is covered with foot-high brush and cactus. I walk in a slow, zigzag pattern along the edge of the dry creek and keep an eye on the open patch between the brush and creek bed. Some desert cottontail will break from the brush toward the dry creek, streak into it, and go either up or down the creek bottom until it climbs out on the far side when it is far enough ahead to escape the hunter. A few will angle away from me as I walk. The sneaking rabbit will move from bush to bush until it feels safe enough to pull out all the stops and head for safer ground, usually with a load of shot tearing up the brush behind it.

If you have a dog or another hunter to work the far side of the creek for you, your chances of success are obviously doubled. Two hunters, or a hunter with a dog, can also work a small hill in desert country by walking around it in a slow circle. Start at the bottom of the hill and slowly work your way to the top of the hill in a spiral pattern. I've jumped as many as a half-dozen desert cottontails on one small hill, which had little more than a twenty-acre knob. The rabbits kept heading toward the top of the knob until near the top, I was chasing them back off the hill.

MARSH AND SWAMP RABBITS

Marsh and swamp rabbits are not cottontails. They are, however, very important game animals. The swamp rabbit lives in the Mississippi drainage as far north as Illinois and Indiana and south to the Gulf, including Alabama. This rabbit has spread into the neighboring states through the various rivers draining into the area. It is found in any river bottom country where the water flow is year-round and there is little

MARSH RABBIT

DESCRIPTION: Length: 15–19 in. Weight: 2½–3 lbs.
Coloration: *Body sides* and *front* and *back legs:* buff/brown. *Back:* dark buff to brown. *Belly, chest,* and *rump:* buff. *Tail:* white under tail. *Underfur:* off-white to buff.

DISTRIBUTION: Florida, southern Georgia, and north along the coast to North Carolina.

PREFERRED HABITAT: Edge areas near lakes, streams, and swamps. Swims easily and is often found in water.

TABLE FARE: Excellent

	EXCELLENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR	REMARKS (shot size/load)
HANDGUNS OR RIFLES					
.22 Short			☐		
.22 Long			☐		
.22 Long Rifle	☐				
.22 Magnum		☐			
Centerfire			☐		
Air Gun		☐			
SHOTGUNS					
10-gauge				☐	
12-gauge	☐				5 or 6 shot; 2½–3¼ drams equiv.
16-gauge	☐				same
28-gauge		☐			same
20-gauge		☐			same
.410				☐	
Archery		☐			
Crossbow		☐			
Slingshot				☐	
Other	☐☐		☐		☐☐ Trapping ☐ Blowgun

SWAMP RABBIT

DESCRIPTION: Length: 18–22 in. Weight: 3–5 lbs.
Coloration: *Body sides* and *front* and *back legs:* brown/buff. *Back:* dark brown/buff. *Belly* and *chest:* buff. *Rump:* buffed white. *Tail:* buffed white under tail. *Underfur:* buff to off-white.

DISTRIBUTION: Eastern Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, Mississippi, eastern Oklahoma, southern Missouri, Illinois, and Indiana.

PREFERRED HABITAT: Edge areas bordering swamps, streams, lakes, ponds, and other watery areas with ample escape cover.

TABLE FARE: Excellent

	EXCELLENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR	REMARKS[a] (shot size/load)
HANDGUNS OR RIFLES					
.22 Short			☐		
.22 Long			☐		
.22 Long Rifle	☐				
.22 Magnum		☐			
Centerfire			☐		
Air Gun		☐			
SHOTGUNS					
10-gauge				☐	
12-gauge	☐				5 or 6 shot; 2½–3¼ drams equiv.
16-gauge	☐				same
28-gauge		☐			same
20-gauge		☐			same
.410				☐	
Archery		☐			
Crossbow		☐			
Slingshot				☐	
Other	☐☐		☐		☐☐ Trapping ☐ Blowgun

disruption by man. The range of the swamp rabbit has been limited by man: where farmers have stripped all the trees right to the edge of the river, the rabbits have disappeared. It is not uncommon to see swamp rabbits in the narrow edge country bordering the smaller streams that flow into the larger streams and rivers that form the Mississippi drainage.

The best way to hunt these rabbits is very, very slowly. The swamp rabbit will find a comfortable wet spot in which to lie near the water where it is hidden by thick growth. The rabbit will not run from the hunter, but will simply hunker down, lay its ears back, and watch the hunter. A dog is the most effective means of getting these bunnies to expose themselves, and the next best method is a second hunter. One hunter moves through the brush along the bottom, while a second hunter moves through the open or high ground about ten yards ahead of the lower hunter, watching for rabbits escaping the brush buster.

There is no way to predict what any rabbit will do once alarmed, but the swamp rabbit's behavior is even tougher to predict. I've seen these rabbits tear up a creek bottom escaping; head for the open country; or even head for the water, swim across it, and climb into the brush on the far side and disappear.

The marsh rabbit lives in Florida and further north along the coast to the upper stretches of North Carolina. It is similar to the swamp rabbit but has a little more love for the water and is an active swimmer. The same hunting method used to get the swamp rabbit applies to the marsh rabbit where possible. However, a very common method of hunting this rabbit is to use a johnboat around the marsh islands to look for the rabbits.

BRUSH AND PYGMY RABBITS

In the far West, there are two more types of rabbits but neither is an important game rabbit. The first is the brush

BRUSH RABBIT

DESCRIPTION: Length: 13–16 in. Weight: 2½–3½ lbs.
Coloration: *Body sides* and *front* and *back legs:* brown-grey. *Back:* brown with grey. *Belly, chest, rump, tail,* and *underfur:* grey.

DISTRIBUTION: Pacific coast from Oregon to the Baja.

PREFERRED HABITAT: Dense brush in arid bottom lands and the thick undergrowth in more humid areas.

TABLE FARE: Excellent where food supply is limited by aridity to scrub growths.

	EXCELLENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR	REMARKS (shot size/load)
HANDGUNS OR RIFLES					
.22 Short			▢		
.22 Long			▢		
.22 Long Rifle	▢				
.22 Magnum		▢			
Centerfire			▢		
Air Gun		▢			
SHOTGUNS					
10-gauge				▢	
12-gauge	▢				5 or 6 shot with light loads because brush areas often require short range
16-gauge	▢				same
28-gauge	▢				same
20-gauge	▢				same
.410			▢		can be used with heavy .410 loads
Archery				▢	
Crossbow			▢		
Slingshot				▢	
Other				▢	some trapping

rabbit, which lives along the Pacific coast from the upper reaches of Oregon down the coast through the Baja. The brush rabbit is very small and does not have the cottontail. Although the rabbit's range is fairly large, hunting pressure is light because of its size. The brush rabbit spends its entire life in brush, moving from thick brush where it lives and breeds to slightly less dense brush to feed.

The trick to hunting the brush rabbit is to use a dog. The brush where the little rabbit lives is so thick and hard to get through that most hunters give up tracking it. Even the use of a dog is sometimes futile, because the rabbits will break from the brush into the open and run for only a few yards before turning back into the brush.

The last group of rabbits, and the smallest, is the pygmy rabbit, which lives in eastern Oregon, parts of Washington, Nevada, Utah, and Montana, and the northeastern part of California. These rabbits are only ten inches long and dig their own burrows. Since their range is mixed with other rabbits, they are often mistaken for young offspring of the larger mountain cottontail.

Regardless of the species of rabbit you hunt, the factor which most limits your success is often the supply of food. Rabbits eat everything green they can find during the spring and summer and turn their attention to twigs and bark in the fall. The rule is to look for feeding areas, which are easily located by searching around the lower six to ten inches of shrubs and grasses for areas where the bunnies have been chewing. Droppings are not a good indicator unless the majority are fresh. A single rabbit can spread a lot of pellets around one area, but a large number of fresh pellets is a fair indicator of a healthy rabbit population.

During the day, rabbits hole up in forms that are shallow depressions or pushed-down mounds of grass about the size of a rabbit's body. In areas where there are a number of heavily used trails, there will also be a number of forms. You can get a fair estimate of the rabbit population by noting the trails and the forms in the area.

The lowly cottontail, or rabbit, is no doubt the most important small-game animal in the nation. From kids to grandfathers, the rabbit is eagerly sought and with good reason. Rabbits are top eating!

SNOWSHOE HARE

I could have sworn I saw something move near the woodpile covered with snow. I was grouse hunting in southern Colorado toward the end of the grouse season and keeping an eye out for any bunnies that might cross my path. The tactic had already paid off with one plump mountain cottontail, in addition to my two grouse. When that "something" moved again, I knew exactly what it was: a snowshoe hare sneaking around the woodpile, using his white fur to every advantage. I started to raise my shotgun when I remembered it was loaded with 7 1/2 shot on a game load—not enough to ensure a clean kill on the hare. I lowered the shotgun and with my free hand, pulled out my .22 magnum H & R revolver, and took careful aim on the black eye of the hare. The snowshoe shot up in the air, landed in the puff of snow, and lay still.

Had I shot the hare with my shotgun load of bird shot, chances are it would have only been wounded and crawled off to die somewhere. Snowshoes, like their very close cousins, the jackrabbits, are tough critters to kill, and a load of small shot in a fairly light load is just not enough to bring down one of the big hares.

Of all the small-game animals I hunt, there are two that I believe are the most striking of all the wild animals in the woods. One is the snowshoe in dead winter when its coat is pure white with only a little black found on the ears. The other is the Abert's squirrel, which is covered in the next chapter.

SNOWSHOE HARE

Description: Length: 16–21 in. Weight: 2–4 lbs.

Coloration: *Body sides, front* and *back legs, back, chest,* and *rump:* brown-grey. *Belly:* grey. *Tail:* grey to white under tail. *Underfur:* grey to buff.

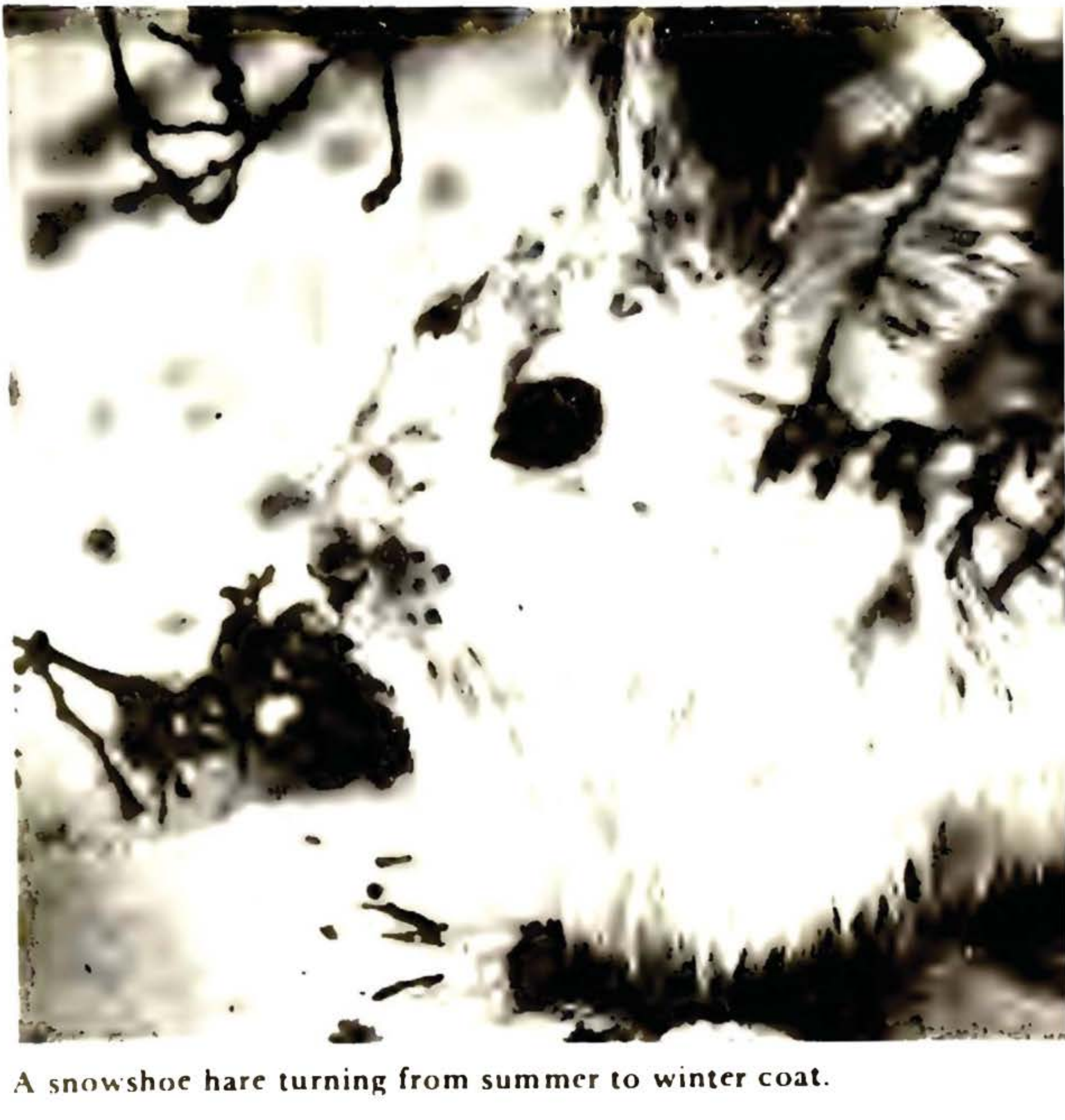
Note: Winter coloration is all white except for black tips on the ears.

Distribution: High elevations of Rocky Mountains, Cascades, Sierra Nevadas, and the mountains of northeast. Also high plains of North Dakota and the Great Lakes region.

Preferred habitat: Forest country of high elevation.

Table fare: Good

	EXCELLENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR	REMARKS (shot size/load)
HANDGUNS OR RIFLES					
.22 Short				▢	
.22 Long				▢	
.22 Long Rifle	▢				with scoped rifle
.22 Magnum	▢				with scoped rifle
Centerfire				▢	
Air Gun		▢			only with very high-velocity rifles
SHOTGUNS					
10-gauge				▢	
12-gauge		▢			4, 5 or 6 shot: 2¾ minimum drams equiv.
16-gauge		▢			
28-gauge		▢			
20-gauge		▢			
.410				▢	
Archery		▢			
Crossbow		▢			
Slingshot				▢	
Other				▢	



A snowshoe hare turning from summer to winter coat.

PHOTO COURTESY OF VERMONT DEPT. OF FISH AND GAME

The snowshoe hare is not a rabbit but a hare. It is interesting to note that while both rabbits and hares are part of the same scientific order (Lagomorpha) and in the same family (Leporidae), they are very different animals. Hares have much larger and longer ears, and their hind feet are much larger than those of rabbits. They are also larger animals and are born fully furred, with eyes open and ears working. Rabbits are born hairless, with their eyes closed. A newborn hare, such as a jack or snowshoe, is ready to hit the world without mother's help if need be. This may in part account for the explosive populations of jacks in some parts of the world.

Whereas a cottontail is hard-pressed to reach three pounds, a small snowshoe weighs over two pounds and the average snowshoe, between three and four pounds. Although the range area of the snowshoe and cottontail will sometimes overlap, the snowshoe prefers the forest, providing there is a stable growth of scrub plants and shrubs.

Snowshoes frown on man's activity in the forest, and wherever development has pushed into snowshoe country the hares have taken off or died out. In our valley, there is a ski area that has destroyed the entire snowshoe population around it, as well as the grouse population.

During the spring and summer months, when the snowshoe is in its dull, brown and grey color phase, the hares feed off the tender shoots of the new growth of various grasses and shrubs and trees. As soon as winter arrives and the snow piles up, the snowshoes use their large feet to keep on top of snowdrifts and eat the ends of the tree branches or shrubs. In some areas the snowshoes have been known to inflict severe damage to young trees during hard winters.

Hunting snowshoes is a difficult and demanding task. The snowshoes found in the United States live in the northwest corner of the country and in the higher elevations of the mountains of the West. The hares keep quite a distance from civilized areas. It is common for snowshoe hunters to don either snowshoes or cross-country skis and trek deep into the woods where the hares live.

One of the best hunting methods when you don't have dogs (and dogs often cannot get through the deep snow) is for three hunters to work together. Since snowshoes will hop away from danger unless directly pressed, two hunters position themselves in stands where they can watch trails in the snow made by snowshoes. The third hunter circles above the hunters and begins a slow, zigzag pattern toward the hunters, pushing the hares out of their cover. By staying above the hunters, the hares are forced downhill, following their trails until they can break away from the trail to circle back behind the moving hunter. The two stationary hunters will usually get several shots at slow-moving hares trying to avoid the moving hunter.

The choice of weapons for hunting snowshoes is determined by the terrain in which you will be hunting. I've jumped snowshoes in thick, dark timber, where you were hard-pressed to see twenty yards, and in more open parks. In areas where you can expect to get more open shots, a .22 rimfire with a scope may be in order. In thick timber where your only shot may be at a hare slipping between trees, a shotgun is a better choice. One of the problems with using a shotgun on a hare is the damage it does to the coat. A snowshoe in its winter prime has a striking fur coat, and the hide is tough enough for it to be turned into a wall rug or tanned for use in a coat. If you plan to keep the furred hide of your snowshoe, use a .22 rimfire with a scope and take head shots only.

Unlike the jackrabbit, the snowshoe feeds on better-quality plant life through the summer and early fall, and they are therefore much better table fare. The snowshoe is somewhat tougher than a cottontail and its meat is darker. If you slow-cook your snowshoe, it will make a very tasty meal.

JACKRABBITS

If I had to pick out the one animal I really don't like to hunt and won't put on the table, it is the jackrabbit. The jack is actually a hare with the same physical characteristics as the snowshoe but the jack lives in lower elevations and in the more arid parts of the country. When I do hunt jacks, I hunt them as varmints and use the meat for bear bait. The exception is when I pot a jack from a clover or hay field and the jack is a young one. I've eaten a few of these young ones and while they were not the best meals I've ever had, they were by far not the worst.

There are two species of jackrabbits found in North America. The whitetailed jack is the largest, measuring from twenty-two to twenty-six inches in length and weighing from six to ten pounds. The blacktailed jack is slightly smaller, at the most twenty-four inches long and weighing seven to eight pounds. The whitetailed jack is more common in the northern parts of the country, while the blacktailed is more common in the southwest, but the two species do overlap in some areas. The blacktailed jack is obviously a creature of the arid country and feeds largely on sagebrush and other dry brush. Its northern cousins feed on the grasses of the high plains and are thus better table fare. In either case, if you intend to eat the jacks, go for the smaller, younger ones and leave the larger jacks for the coyotes or use them as bear bait.

One of my favorite methods of hunting jacks is to head out in the late afternoon. Jacks will begin to move around as the sun slips toward the horizon. If you are equipped with a good spotting scope and a good rifle, either a centerfire varmint rifle or a .22 magnum, you can often park on a rise

The hind foot of a jackrabbit. Hares have the same kind of feet, but rabbits lack the pronounced toes.

BLACKTAILED JACKRABBIT

DESCRIPTION: Length: 18-24 in. Weight: 4-8 lbs.
Coloration: *Body sides, front* and *back legs, back*, and *chest:* brown-grey. *Belly:* white. *Rump:* brown-black. *Tail:* black. *Underfur:* brown to buff grey.

DISTRIBUTION: Grasslands and deserts of the western United States.

PREFERRED HABITAT: Arid country with low-growing brush.

TABLE FARE: Poor

	EXCELLENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR	REMARKS (shot size/load)
HANDGUNS OR RIFLES					
.22 Short				▢	
.22 Long				▢	
.22 Long Rifle		▢			with scoped rifle or handgun
.22 Magnum		▢			with scoped rifle or handgun
Centerfire	▢				long-range varmint-type shooting
Air Gun			▢		with high-velocity scoped rifles only
SHOTGUNS					
10-gauge		▢			4 or 5 shot with magnum loads
12-gauge		▢			same
16-gauge		▢			same
28-gauge				▢	
20-gauge				▢	
.410				▢	
Archery			▢		very difficult targets
Crossbow		▢			
Slingshot				▢	
Other				▢	

WHITETAILED JACKRABBIT

DESCRIPTION: 22–26 in. Weight: 6–10 lbs.
Coloration: *Body sides, front* and *back legs,* and *back:* brown-grey. *Belly, chest,* and *rump:* grey-white. *Tail:* white. *Underfur:* grey.

NOTE: Winter coloration is all white in the northern region.

DISTRIBUTION: Northern half of western United States.

PREFERRED HABITAT: Grasslands

TABLE FARE: Fair to good with young jacks.

	EXCELLENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR	REMARKS (shot size/load)
HANDGUNS OR RIFLES					
.22 Short				☐	
.22 Long				☐	
.22 Long Rifle		☐			with scoped rifle or handgun
.22 Magnum		☐			with scoped rifle or handgun
Centerfire	☐				long-range varmint-type shooting
Air Gun			☐		high-velocity scoped rifles only
SHOTGUNS					
10-gauge		☐			4 or 5 shot with magnum loads
12-gauge		☐			same
16-gauge		☐			same
28-gauge				☐	
20-gauge				☐	
.410				☐	
Archery			☐		very difficult targets
Crossbow		☐			
Slingshot				☐	
Other				☐	

and begin scanning the area for moving jacks. Since they like to stop and perk up their ears and listen as well as look around for danger, they present interesting targets for long-range shooting.

Another method of hunting is to walk through the area where jacks are known to live. Jackrabbits are hard to kill because their speed will quickly carry them out of shotgun range. Most hunters prefer to use a scoped varmint rifle or .22 and wait for the jacks to stop and look around. In most cases when they don't feel pressured, they will stop after covering fifty to seventy-five yards to see what scared them. When they stop, you have an excellent sitting target.

Jackrabbits are pests and can quickly overrun an area where there is little hunting pressure. Most ranchers are eager to allow a good hunter on their land to dispose of the jackrabbits as a means of keeping their population in check. As with all wild game, it is a good management practice not to wipe out an animal population even though they are pests. Predators feed on jacks and cottontails and as long as they have a food supply, they will leave the more important game animals alone. If the jacks are cleaned out, coyotes, cats, or other predators in the area will turn to other animals for their food supply.

4.

SQUIRRELS

The woods were oppressively quiet. Sitting with my old single-shot .22 across my knees, I was afraid to move anything more than my eyes as I waited for the wildlife to stir. In the distance, I heard a crow talking to the sky with its loud "caw-caw." I kept my attention on the big oak I had picked out the afternoon before. A large lower limb, outlined by the morning sky, caught my attention. As I watched, a squirrel moved briefly, his tail flicking slightly. I raised the rifle, lined the open sights up, settled the squirrel's head above the bead, and squeezed the trigger. The shot echoed through the woods, followed by the crash of the squirrel as it tumbled to the ground. Ten minutes later a second squirrel appeared on a higher limb, and I added him to my bag.

Two squirrels from one tree was about the maximum so I moved on to the next squirrel tree where I collected one more bushy tail before calling the hunt "over." That was many years ago when squirrel hunting was fast becoming one of the more difficult small-game sports. There weren't many squirrels left.

In many of the small towns across America, squirrel populations have increased and the animals are moving out of the city and into rural areas, where they can be hunted. Recently, an orchard owner whose orchard is only a half-mile outside a Colorado community asked me to come and hunt the squirrels in his orchard.

"They are getting to be as troublesome as the deer and are doing more damage to my crops," he said.

Hunting squirrels has long been a respected small-game sport as well as a major source of food when the country was being settled. Because of the squirrel's natural wariness and small size, demands were placed on American gunmakers for accurate rifles. Squirrels are still an important food source and top the list of small-game animals regarding table fare.

To be a successful squirrel hunter today demands patience and determination. Although small, squirrels have sharp eyes and ears and a fair sense of smell. Today's squirrel hunter should don camouflage clothing for the hunt, including either a camouflage net to cover the face or camouflage paint.

The real trick to squirrel hunting is patience. I like to have a squirrel tree picked out in advance. Before dawn, I find a good hiding place where I will be hidden by the morning shadows. Then I wait. As the sun comes up, the squirrels appear. On this first stand, I do not use a call but simply wait for the squirrels to expose themselves. If I am using a .22 rimfire, I try to shoot where a miss will fall harmlessly downrange. Because of the angle I am shooting, I use standard velocity hollow-point rounds. The HP will usually hit and then stop or fall just beyond the target. A solid slug will go on through and keep going. Although a shotgun is effective on squirrels, it requires a closer range, and the shot damage to the meat is enough that I prefer the .22 rimfire.

My favorite squirrel gun when I am hunting the river-bottom country is the Beeman R1 air rifle in .22 caliber with a scope. I can take shots at squirrels as far as sixty yards with ease; but the pellet won't travel so far that I have to avoid taking some shots because of built-up areas. With both the .22 rimfire and the high-velocity air gun, a good head shot will not damage the meat of the animal.

After picking off two or three squirrels from the first tree, I move on to the next tree, covering ground as slowly as pos-

FOX SQUIRREL

Description: Length: 26–28 in Weight: 1½– 3 lbs.

Coloration: *Body sides, front legs, back,* and *rump:* rust. *Back legs:* inside of legs are lighter rust. *Belly* and *chest:* light rust. *Tail:* tips of hairs are usually orange.

Note: The fox squirrel may resemble the grey squirrel in the Northeast and is black in the South.

Distribution: Eastern half of U.S. from Canada to Mexico.

Preferred habitat: Open woods and near urban areas where food and mature trees are found in abundance. Slowly migrating west.

Table fare: Excellent, although the grey is considered even better.

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Remarks (shot size/load)
Handguns or Rifles					
.22 Short		☐			with single-shot rifle and scope
.22 Long		☐			same
.22 Long Rifle	☐				good rifle and scope
.22 Magnum				☐	too much velocity
Centerfire				☐	
Air Gun	☐				any air gun with minimum velocity of 450 fps
Shotguns					
10-gauge				☐	
12-gauge		☐			
16-gauge		☐			
28-gauge	☐				5, 6 or 7½ shot; 2½–3¼ drams equiv.
20-gauge	☐				
.410			☐		
Archery		☐			
Crossbow	☐				crossbow with scope
Slingshot		☐			lead shot only
Other				☐	

sible. At each stop, I examine distant trees for squirrels with my Bausch & Lomb 7x24 armored binoculars. Often I'll spot a squirrel on a limb that appears to be a knot in the distance, and I can sneak into position for a shot.

When I reach my next squirrel tree, I again settle myself into position. By this time the activity in the woods is enough that I can call a squirrel. Squirrel calling is simple and only a few chatterings are needed to get the squirrels answering. Often a few chatters of the call will bring a squirrel bounding from tree to tree or along the ground to find out who the new guy is on the block. I've used the call on both fox and grey squirrels with equal success.

There are various species of squirrels in the United States. The two most important are the fox and grey squirrels. The total number of these animals harvested each year by hunters does not really make a dent in their populations. Other species include the Abert's, or tassle-eared squirrel, and the red squirrel. Both of these are hunted for the table although not to the degree of the others, and the red squirrel is a little small for serious hunting.

FOX SQUIRREL

The fox squirrel gets its name from its coloration, which is similar to that of a fox. The range of the fox squirrel is recognized as the eastern half of the nation from Canada to Mexico. The fox squirrel is found in all the Gulf states and north to the Great Lakes but its range is limited in the southern portion of New York State. Although the *recognized* range of the fox squirrel is the eastern half of the nation, the fox squirrel appears to be migrating west following the river-bottom country where there are ample mast crops. The fox squirrels are now found as far west as the foothills of the Rocky Mountains.

The acorn is the favorite food of the fox squirrel. How-

GREY SQUIRREL

DESCRIPTION: Length: 17-20 in. Weight: 1-1½ lbs.
Coloration: *Body sides, front* and *back legs, back, rump,* and *tail:* grey/silver grey. *Belly* and *chest:* lighter grey.

DISTRIBUTION: Eastern grey is found in the eastern half of the nation into Maine. Western grey is found along the West Coast from Baja to Washington.

PREFERRED HABITAT: Dense woods.

TABLE FARE: Excellent; greys are the highest rated of small-game animals.

	EXCELLENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR	REMARKS (shot size/load)
HANDGUNS OR RIFLES					
.22 Short		▢			with single-shot rifle and scope
.22 Long		▢			same
.22 Long Rifle	▢				same
.22 Magnum				▢	
Centerfire				▢	
Air Gun	▢				any air gun with minimum velocity of 450 fps
SHOTGUNS					
10-gauge				▢	
12-gauge		▢			5, 6 or 7½ shot; 2½-3¼ drams equiv.
16-gauge		▢			
28-gauge	▢				
20-gauge	▢				
.410			▢		
Archery		▢			
Crossbow	▢				crossbow with scope
Slingshot		▢			lead shot only
Other				▢	

ever, since these animals are more comfortable in the open woodlands, they are seldom found in dense woods. Other foods of the fox squirrel include black walnuts, pecans, butternuts, and berries.

The fox squirrel is also adept at raiding gardens. I've watched fox squirrels raid my own garden enough to know that they are willing to risk an encounter with the family dog or cat to get at the garden. The only way to stop the raiding is to trap the animal and move it several miles or kill it.

The average fox squirrel weighs about one and one-half pounds and the largest fox squirrel will hit three pounds. At full length, fox squirrels are twenty-eight to thirty inches, but as much as half that length is tail.

GREY SQUIRRELS

Grey squirrels are found in much the same area as the fox variety but their range also extends further into the northeast to the southern half of Maine. The western grey is found along the west coast from Baja to Oregon. The grey squirrel also appears to be extending its range into areas where there is ample food.

Both grey and fox squirrels feed on the ground much of the time, but the grey is a lot more industrious than the fox. A fox squirrel will bury its whole winter supply of nuts in one place and hope the cache is not discovered by marauding squirrels or other animals. The grey will bury each nut individually. The grey also prefers more dense wood than the fox and is a little more difficult to hunt.

Grey squirrels are slightly smaller than fox squirrels and average about twenty inches in length with their tails measuring eight or nine inches. The average grey weighs about a pound. On close examination, the coloration of the grey is a salt and pepper mix.

ABERT SQUIRRELS

There is no animal in the pine forest as striking as the Abert squirrel. The Abert is a large squirrel, often larger than the biggest fox squirrel. The Abert is dark grey to black with a swath of red chestnut along its back. Its belly and the inside of its legs are white. The fur is soft and thick but the most prominent feature of this squirrel is the tips of its ears. A single tuft of fur sticking up from the ear gives this squirrel the name "tufted-ear squirrel."

The Abert squirrel lives in the pine forest above six thousand feet. While this animal is one of the most beautiful in the woods, its flesh has a pine taste, and most Aberts are taken for trophies. It is a common belief that this animal should be fully protected because it is rarely seen. However, the Abert's population is stable throughout its range in Colorado, Utah, Arizona, New Mexico, and Mexico. The truth is these animals are very secretive, and it takes a very skillful hunter with a gun or camera to get within range of one of them. The effort, even if only for a picture, is worth it.

A relative of the Abert squirrel worth mentioning is the Kaibab squirrel which is found on an isolated plateau of forest near the Grand Canyon. This squirrel is fully protected and is rarely seen. Some hunters mistake the Abert for this rare animal, but the Kaibab is found only on that single plateau. Wherever the Abert is found, it can be hunted, although many states require special permits.

OTHER SQUIRRELS

There are a number of other squirrels in the woods but only the small red squirrel, found in most pine forests of the West, is hunted. The red squirrel's body is only seven or eight inches and the tail four to eight inches, for an overall length of sixteen inches. Another squirrel, the Douglas, is slightly

ABERT SQUIRREL

DESCRIPTION: Length: 26–30 in. Weight: 2–3½ lbs.
Coloration: *Body sides, rump,* and *tail:* grey. *Front* and *back legs:* grey; inside of legs are white. *Back:* red-chestnut. *Belly:* white. *Chest:* grey-white.

DISTRIBUTION: Pine forest of the West above 6,000 feet.

PREFERRED HABITAT: Pine forest.

TABLE FARE: Poor to fair. Where the Abert can feed on nuts other than pine nuts, the meat is better.

NOTE: Chart is based on hunting Abert squirrel for mounting. See fox squirrel chart for hunting Abert for food.

	EXCELLENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR	REMARKS (shot size/load)
HANDGUNS OR RIFLES					
.22 Short				☐	
.22 Long				☐	
.22 Long Rifle				☐	
.22 Magnum				☐	
Centerfire				☐	
Air Gun	☐				good rifle with scope, shooting flat-nosed pellets to stun animal
SHOTGUNS					
10-gauge				☐	
12-gauge		☐			
16-gauge		☐			7½ shot with light load to avoid destroying the pelt
28-gauge	☐				
20-gauge	☐				
.410		☐			
Archery				☐	
Crossbow				☐	
Slingshot	☐				lead shot only
Other				☐	

smaller than the grey squirrel and has much the same coloration but is only slightly more brown. The Douglas squirrel is found in the coniferous forest of the northwest south through the Cascade and Sierra Nevada mountains.

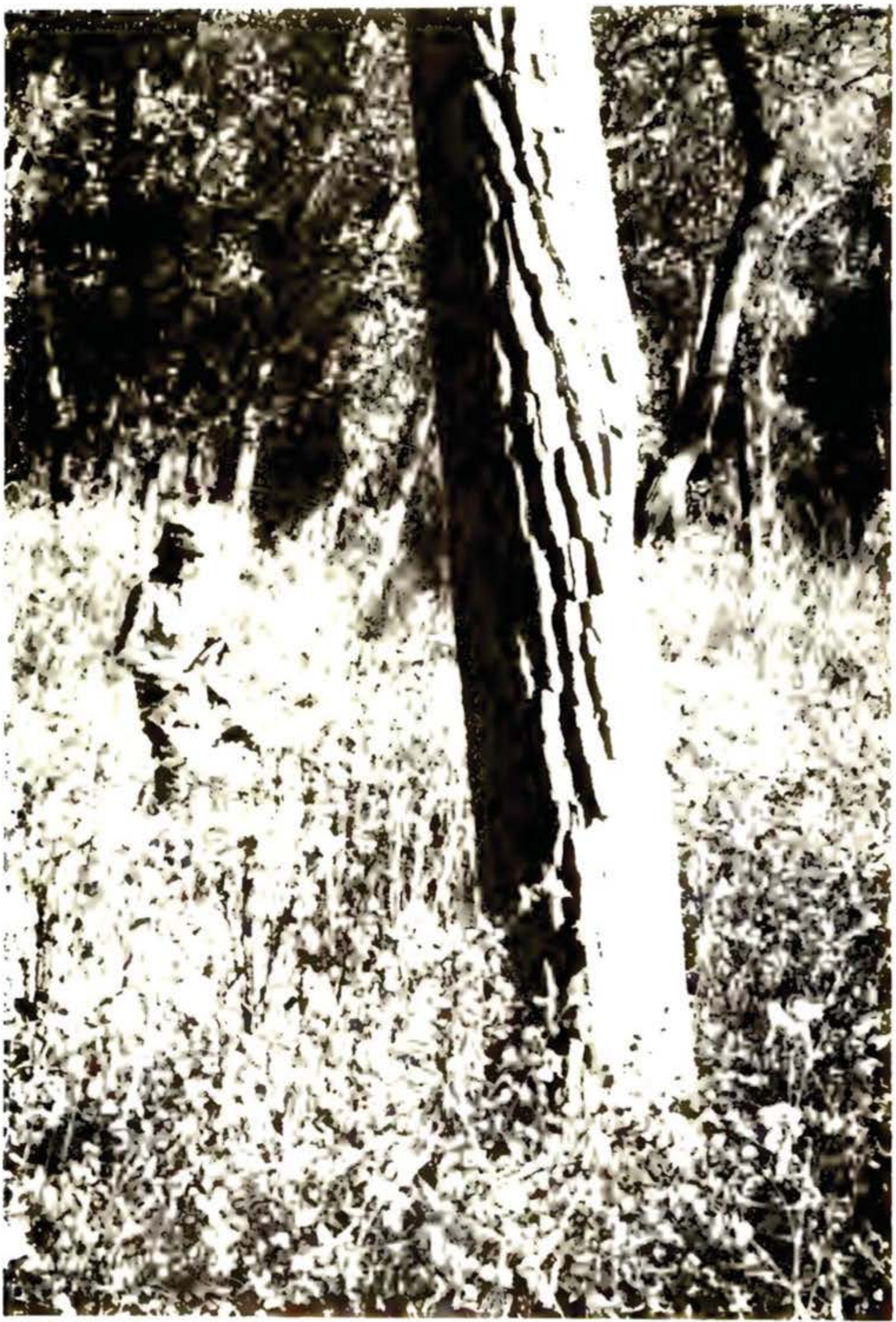
There are also a fair number of ground squirrels found throughout the United States. These include the Richardson, Townsend, thirteen-lined, spotted, Franklin, rock, and California. All of these are fairly small and, depending on the state, are either protected or listed as varmints with no closed season. The rock squirrel is found in arid regions in the rocky areas around pinyon pines and junipers. Rock squirrels are often confused with grey squirrels, but the grey ones are larger and do not have the variegated black and white on the upper parts of the body.

Actually, I've never been able to understand why some of these small squirrels are hunted because they are an important food source for various mid-sized predators and all raptors.

SQUIRREL HUNTING

As I pointed out at the start of this chapter, squirrel hunting demands skill and patience—in equal amounts. Although I am sure squirrels have been taken with every weapon in the woods, by far the best choice is the .22 rimfire rifle with a scope. A dedicated squirrel hunter will take as much pride in his squirrel gun as the deer hunter does in his deer rifle. I use my Ruger 10/22 with the Bushnell scope for squirrel hunting in areas where the shot doesn't present a danger, and in closer areas I use the Beeman R1. Some bow hunters who are really good use flu-flu arrows with blunt tips for hunting squirrels. Crossbows are also rapidly becoming popular squirrel arms when equipped with scopes and blunt bolts.

There are millions of squirrels killed each year with shotguns, and I've taken a fair number of squirrels with shotguns



Author moving quietly through squirrel woods. Note that he is fully camouflaged.

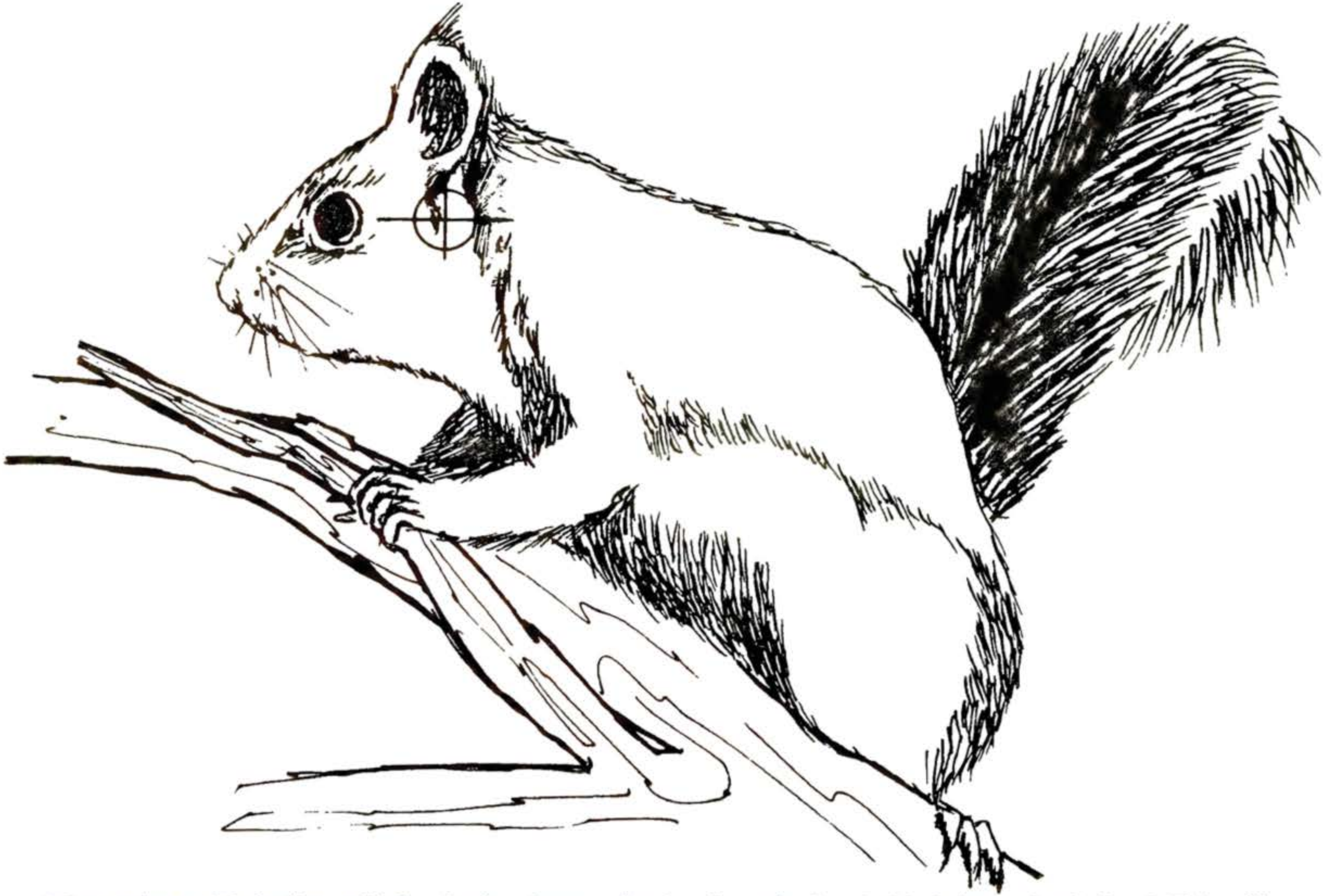
myself. The shotgun is very popular when hunting for squirrels from a boat or canoe because the gentle rocking is too much for a rifle shooter to handle. In this method, the hunter takes his canoe or boat upstream, then floats silently downstream, eyeing the overhanging branches for squirrels which he picks off as he floats within range. In areas where this is possible, this is the most productive method I've encountered for squirrel hunting and, in addition, requires little effort.

In general, hunting squirrels is a time-consuming process of moving slowly through the woods and carefully watching for squirrels in the trees and on the ground. A squirrel that is spooked will put a branch or tree trunk between itself and the hunter and will then take off for a safe place without the hunter knowing it. The trick is to spot a squirrel far enough in advance so that it doesn't know you are in the area. This is where binoculars such as the 7x24 Bausch & Lomb compacts prove their worth. These glasses have excellent light-gathering optics, and in the early morning or shaded woods, they provide a good view of the squirrel's habitat. These binoculars also fit nicely into my cammie jacket pocket.

Any noise will alert the squirrels to your presence. Soft clothing that will not crackle or scrape is essential, and soft-soled boots or boots with thick wool socks pulled over them are also important hunting aids.

When you down a squirrel, don't rush out and pick it up unless a mercy killing of a wounded animal is in order. If the squirrel plops down dead, sit back and wait. Very rarely will you see only one squirrel in a tree. The tree holding one squirrel will often hold three or four and you can collect a second squirrel from the same tree if you are willing to wait five or ten minutes.

Whenever I find a tree that seems to have several squirrels in it, I watch the tree to see how many are calling it home. If I only see one or two squirrels, I take only one. If I see a half-



When using a .22 rimfire or high-velocity air gun, aim for the point just behind the squirrel's head. This will ensure a quick kill with no meat loss.

dozen or more, I'll take two or three, leaving the rest to breed. A favorite woods I used to hunt was discovered by a hunter who cleaned out the entire squirrel population in less than a week, and after two years a squirrel had still not moved back into the area.

Squirrel calling has become popular as a hunting method because it allows the hunter to bring the squirrels to him. There are several good calls on the market and all of them are easy to use. A caller finds a place to sit where he is hidden and can watch several trees. A single caller can collect several bushy tails from one spot before the animals in the area become spooked and he is forced to move on. Because a caller is often forced to take shots at moving squirrels, most of the callers I've hunted with prefer to use a shotgun rather than a .22.

The first consideration in locating an area in which to hunt squirrels is to find a food supply. Since squirrels eat nuts and store them for the winter, they must have a stable supply of nuts nearby. The type of nut will depend on what trees grow in the area. To find out if squirrels are feeding on the nut crop, study the ground around the nuts. Although the squirrels will bury most of the nuts they find, they will also feed heavily on the nuts in the area by chewing a hole through the nut's shell to get at the meat inside.

The feeding area of the squirrels will usually be several hundred yards from their home trees. Both the fox and grey squirrels can be located by quietly searching the woods for their nests. The squirrel tree will usually be the largest tree in the area although squirrels will sometimes forego an obviously big tree for a smaller one to avoid having to carry the nuts too far.

A male and female squirrel will set up housekeeping in a hollow or den of a tree whenever possible. If they have to build a nest, it is made from old leaves and twigs and is located in the crotch of the tree. The nest is usually thirty to forty feet from the ground and in an open part of the tree where the squirrel can see approaching danger. Some hunters try to blast squirrels out of their nest but this is one of the stupidest moves a hunter can make. A frightened squirrel will stay in its nest, and the only thing the shot or bullets whizzing through will do is make it sit tighter until it is killed. Shooting into any nest is a waste of wildlife!

Hunting an Abert squirrel is a little tougher. The Abert does not live in a single tree nor is its population controlled by the mast crop. These squirrels are spread out through the woods and will not come to a call. The best method for hunting Abert squirrels is to hunt very slowly through an area where the squirrels are known to live. When an Abert squirrel is alerted, it will streak across the ground to the nearest tree (if not already in one) and run straight to the top where it can watch the danger. Except for mounting as a trophy, the Abert is not on the top of my list as a game animal. These striking squirrels have little food value and their pelts are not bought by the fur market. Like most other people who see these squirrels, I enjoy watching them rather than shooting them.

When I am hunting squirrels, I take care to cool the animal as quickly as possible. I also make very sure any squirrel I shoot is dead before picking it up. A wounded squirrel that hits the ground is often stunned and will lie motionless for several minutes before beginning to twitch. I watch the "dead" squirrel to make sure. As a teenager, my hunting partner picked up a "dead" squirrel that inflicted several nasty bites before he could turn it loose. The squirrel was checked for rabies and found healthy but my friend still has the scars twenty years later! Also, do not carry squirrels in a manner in which fleas can migrate from the dead animal to you.

With proper handling in the field you will find squirrel to be one of the most exciting meals you can put on your table.

Squirrels can be made into pies, fried, baked, barbecued or anything else. The effort of the hunt is worth the reward on the dinner table!

5.

VARMINTS

A prickly pear cactus plant served as my blind while I waited for the prairie dogs to come out of their hole. I sipped a little water from my canteen and then picked up my binoculars and scanned the area in front of me. I had left the spotting scope behind. The kind of prairie dog hunting I was doing demanded a little more attention to things at ground level than sitting back in the pickup or Jeep at 250 yards or more and picking off the varmints. I was within twenty-five yards of the prairie dog town and playing a waiting game. Finally, one of the dogs started barking and I knew it was only a matter of a few more minutes. I checked my .22 magnum one more time and then settled behind it to wait.

At least five more minutes passed before the first dog poked its head out of its hole. I watched it through the binoculars for several minutes before it finally climbed out and stood on the edge of the burrow. I knew if I waited, a few more would climb out. Within minutes I was watching a half-dozen of the foot-long brown dogs running around their burrows. Selecting one target, I eased the rifle up to my shoulder and steadied the crosshairs of the Weaver 4-9X on the dog's head and squeezed. The .22 magnum HP lifted the dog off the ground and tumbled him backward. I quickly worked the bolt and shifted to another mound. A dog was running toward it, reacting to the noise of the shot. As expected, it stopped for one last look around before ducking into the safety of the burrow. The Weaver found its mark and I pulled off another shot, tagging my second dog.

For several seconds I scanned the area. Then I laid the rifle down and walked over and picked up both dogs and carried them back to my makeshift blind. The day's total was four blacktailed prairie dogs. The longest shot taken that afternoon was 125 yards. The shortest was 30 yards. Several days before I had been shooting prairie dogs in another town with a .30-06 loaded with Remington Accelerators at ranges of 300-plus yards, spotting the dogs with a 20X-45X Bushnell Spacemaster spotting scope. On another occasion, a rancher friend asked me to take out several dogs that were taking up residence in his pasture. I had to use an HV air gun because the pasture was right on the edge of town. In short, you can use just about any method you want to successfully hunt varmints.

Varmint hunting is one of the fastest growing of the shooting sports. For good reason, varmint hunting demands attention to detail. Any shooter who expects to hit a three-inch target at a range of fifty to three hundred yards or more and obtain a clean kill has to stay in practice. No matter what caliber or type of gun is used, skill is critical to success and skill is obtained through practice.

A number of animals once classified as varmints are now considered protected species or have moved up a notch to "fur-bearing animal" status and are hunted for their pelts. I have been of the opinion for several years that some of the animals classed as "varmints" should be placed in another group. In this book I have made my own division. In the next chapter I cover raccoons, opossum, and pest animals and in another chapter, the predators. Under the heading of "varmints," I prefer to group animals that are considered sporting, yet have little or no food or fur value. In the varmint group, I place the prairie dogs, woodchucks, and marmots.

Why varmint hunt if they have so little value? Prairie dogs, chucks, and marmots are challenging animals to hunt. Alert, wary, and difficult to hit even at close range, they demand a fairly high degree of shooting skill. Hunters who believe the real test of hunting skill is not limited either to distance shooting or stalking can combine both in varmint shooting.

VARMINT HUNTING GEAR

I once watched an archer sitting under a tree pick off prairie dogs as they emerged from their holes. He would wait under the tree for the dogs to come out, pick one off, then wait for the rest to come back out and pick off another. Not only was he a skillful archer, but he had the patience of Job. It paid off.

As I said, I've hunted prairie dogs with a .22 rimfire up to a .30-06 loaded with Accelerators. You can varmint hunt with nearly anything, but the dedicated varmint hunter is equipped with a rifle designed for varmint hunting, a scope powerful enough to see a chuck blink at two hundred yards, and all the related gear. You can get that involved in the sport or just continue to knock off dogs and chucks with a .22. Depending on your point of view, the most popular varmint round today is either the .222 or .223 Remington. Both of these are flat-shooting, high-velocity rounds that are easily reloaded and fairly inexpensive to shoot. Since varmint hunting demands practice, reloading cost is a key factor. Other popular "factory available" varmint rounds are the 6mm Remington and .243 Winchester. Some hunters use the .270 caliber, but this is usually too loud for varmint shooting and is more of a deer-sized game round.

There are many other calibers used on varmints. Some, such as the .218 Bee and the .219 Zipper, have faded out of popularity in favor of the .222 and .223. Others, such as the .22/250, caused so much barrel damage and were so expensive to reload that shooters dropped them in favor of more economical calibers.

VARMINT OPTICS

The best rifle is still a simple wood and metal affair without good optics. I learned this lesson watching a hunting client trying to zero-in a cheap scope on his rifle. He had bought two scopes for under thirty dollars each and had mounted one on his .30-06. The other he kept for a spare. He tried both scopes and ended up hunting open sights. The cheap scopes could not take the hammering of the big rifle. Most varmint hunters opt for a fixed power scope matched to the rifle rather than a variable power scope. The variable power scopes are excellent for the deer or elk hunter, and I wouldn't go into the woods without one. For varmint hunting, where the shot must be in a tiny area the size of a baseball, the fixed power scopes with their much clearer optics have it all over the variables.

There are varmint scopes made for varmint rifles. These are large scopes with 10X on up to 24X and focus rings that allow the shooter to quickly focus on his target from one hundred to four hundred yards. I've always felt it was foolish to buy a varmint rifle and then mount a cheap scope on it. If you buy a varmint rifle, get the very best scope you can buy for it. If you are a shooter interested in long shots, get a target scope that will give you very precise shot placement with external adjustments. If you are a hunter and plan to get within 150 yards of your target, a good hunting scope will do the job, providing it is well built and can take the pounding of the varmint rifle.

A friend of mine hunts varmints with a handgun, and I've seen him take seventy-five-yard shots with ease. It is a real skill, and the growth of silhouette shooting has made shooting of varmints with handguns popular. For me, the minimal caliber for handgun shooting of varmints is the .357. I've shot my share of varmints with a .22, but they have all been shots at very stupid prairie dogs that stuck their heads out of the ground when I was walking within thirty to fifty yards of them. Just as the dedicated rifle varmint hunter has specialized equipment, so has the handgun varmint hunter. The difference is that most handgun hunters who chase varmints can also use their handguns on deer and other large animals in areas where handgun hunting of big game is legal. The handguns are equipped with pistol scopes and the loads are usually custom handloads, which give the handgun its peak possible performance.

In the area of optics, a critical consideration is being able to find the game. For looking over wide expanses of country at one time, a good pair of 7x35 or 7x50 binoculars is critical. For picking out targets at longer range, I use a 20X-45X Bushnell Spacemaster spotting scope.

Another piece of equipment you will need for varmint hunting is a support to hold the rifle steady over long range. Many of the varmint shooters I've been with in the field no longer use bipods attached to the rifle but have opted for a "Y" support. This is made from tube aluminum bolted together to form a Y. A leather strap is tied between the two forks and the gun rests on the leather. This allows the shooter to move the rifle around without fear that the stock and barrel will move apart and change the strike of the bullet the fraction of an inch it takes to miss a varmint at two hundred yards or more.

HUNTING TECHNIQUES

There are several ways to hunt varmints. Where it is possible to drive along country roads, stop every hundred yards or so and scan the fields for varmints. Use a tailgate bench-rest rig with spotting scopes and other long-

Prairie dogs are challenging animals to hunt and demand a high degree of shooting skill.

range shooting gear that is too heavy for lugging around.

In the high-country homes of the marmots, heavy equipment is useless. Since marmots are found at timberline, a little hiking is required to get at the animals and the most you can expect to carry is a lightweight spotting scope in addition to your rifle and scope. The trick here is to climb a ridge and then carefully glass the ridge across from you for the marmots. On rare occasions, you can catch marmots down by a lake playing in the grass.

For the varmint hunter who wants to practice stalking, getting close enough for a shot with a .22 rimfire is a challenge in both skill and patience. The chances of actually sneaking up on a varmint for a shot are rare at best. However, if you can get within fifty yards without causing too much of a ruckus, get in a blind and wait till you can pick off the varmints as they come out of hiding. Although air guns have not been used very much on varmints, they are effective if they have ample velocity. The trick here is to build a blind several days before you plant to hunt. Then sneak into the blind and wait patiently for the animals to come out.

No matter what weapons or hunting method you use, you will find yourself challenged by the varmints. They have keen eyes and are constantly on the alert for danger. Even the most successful varmint hunter will admit that the time spent in the field per varmint is greater than for any other small-game animal.

PRAIRIE DOGS

At one time, prairie dog towns stretched across the nation from the Mississippi River west. Today the dog towns are not nearly as large nor are the animals as widespread. The animals were not hunted out but poisoned by farmers and ranchers. A large dog population will destroy the grasses in a pasture

BLACKTAILED PRAIRIE DOG

DESCRIPTION Length: 15 in. Weight: 1½–3 lbs.
Coloration: *Body sides, front* and *back legs,* and *back:* brown. *Belly, chest,* and *rump:* buffed brown. *Tail:* brown with black tip. *Underfur:* red to brown.

DISTRIBUTION Most colonies are located in high elevations along the front range of the Rockies. Still found in many of the high plains areas of the West, although limited.

PREFERRED HABITAT Open country with good drainage so that water does not flood burrows. Semiarid parts of the West.

TABLE FARE Poor; may be eaten in an emergency although they have a strong "earthy" flavor.

	EXCELLENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR	REMARKS (shot size/load)
HANDGUNS OR RIFLES					
.22 Short				☐	
.22 Long				☐	
.22 Long Rifle			☐		
.22 Magnum		☐			
Centerfire	☐				.222 up to .243
Air Gun			☐		
SHOTGUNS					
10-gauge				☐	
12-gauge				☐	
16-gauge				☐	
28-gauge				☐	
20-gauge				☐	
.410				☐	
Archery			☐		
Crossbow			☐		
Slingshot				☐	
Other				☐	

WHITETAILED PRAIRIE DOG

DESCRIPTION: Length: 15 in.   Weight: 1½–3 lbs.
Coloration: *Body sides, front* and *back legs*, and *back:* brown. *Belly, chest,* and *rump:* buffed brown. *Tail:* brown with white tip. *Underfur:* red to brown.

DISTRIBUTION: Most colonies are found in the high mountain valleys of the Rocky Mountains from southern Montana to New Mexico.

PREFERRED HABITAT: Rocky hillsides with ample drainage and soil firm enough to dig burrows. Semiarid country of the Rockies where there is ample food supply.

TABLE FARE: Poor; may be eaten in an emergency.

	EXCELLENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR	REMARKS (shot size/load)
HANDGUNS OR RIFLES					
.22 Short				▢	
.22 Long				▢	
.22 Long Rifle			▢		
.22 Magnum		▢			
Centerfire	▢				.222 up to 30-06 (Accelerator)
Air Gun			▢		
SHOTGUNS					
10-gauge				▢	
12-gauge				▢	
16-gauge				▢	
28-gauge				▢	
20-gauge				▢	
.410				▢	
Archery			▢		
Crossbow			▢		
Slingshot				▢	
Other				▢	

and weaken the surface so that an animal or piece of farm equipment can fall through. In winter, if the snow piles up and hides the holes, an animal may fall in one.

Wherever prairie dogs are found, you will find coyotes. And if the climate is right, you'll also find foxes, badgers, and bobcats as well. The dogs are high on the food shopping-list of predators and actually serve a useful purpose by keeping the predators from livestock or more desirable game animals.

There are two species of prairie dogs: the blacktailed dog, which covers the U.S. from Canada to Mexico in staggering numbers, and the whitetailed prairie dogs, which are found in mountain valleys from Montana to central Arizona and New Mexico. Both species are about fifteen inches long and weigh from one and one-half to three pounds as adults. Both species are grey to red-brown with lighter-colored bellies. It is when a dog takes off on a run that you can tell the difference between the two varieties. The blacktailed dog has a black tip on its tail, while the whitetailed dog has a slightly shorter tail with white hairs on the tip.

You will seldom see one prairie dog. They are gregarious animals and live together in ever-expanding towns. Their burrows are easily spotted as cones six or more inches above the ground. The cone is packed down into a dike by the dog's front feet to hold back water during the rainy season. Whenever you see such mounds, you are looking at blacktailed prairie dogs. The whitetailed dogs live on the sides of hills in mountain areas where the rains do not flood.

Prairie dogs feed in a pattern. They will eat every plant around their burrow to give them a better field of view and also feed in another area anywhere from a few yards to fifty yards from the burrow. The average dog will feed for a few seconds and then stand up on its hind legs to scan the area for danger. During the hotter parts of the summer, the dogs will stay in their burrows during the afternoons, coming out in the morning and late afternoon to feed. The summer is the best time to hunt prairie dogs in order to keep in form for big-game seasons later in the year. Like all animals, however, the dogs should be left alone in the spring during the mating season and while raising their young, unless an area is so infested that the population must be drastically reduced.

MARMOTS

Tell someone you are going marmot hunting and chances are they are going to give you a blank look. Tell them you are going woodchuck, groundhog, or rockchuck hunting and they will know what you are talking about. The yellow-bellied marmot is sometimes called the rockchuck, and the woodchuck is often called a groundhog. All three of the marmots (the woodchuck or American marmot, the rockchuck or yellow-bellied marmot, and the hoary marmot) are fine game animals in the varmint group and are eagerly sought by varmint shooters across the country. Like the prairie dog, they are difficult targets to hit.

The most popular of the three is the woodchuck. The woodchuck is more widespread than the others; thus it is not nearly as difficult to find. Woodchucks live in the rolling farm fields of the eastern half of the United States. Like the prairie dog, the woodchuck digs a burrow, and its home is easily located by the cone-shaped mounds of soil. A big difference between prairie dogs and woodchucks is that a chuck will dig three or more openings into his underground home and at least one will be hidden in brush or weeds.

Although hunting pressure on woodchucks is high, it does not seem to have had any effect on the population. What does affect the number is farm pressure. Farming activity forces the animals out of the more open areas into the edges of fields.

The rockchuck, or yellow-bellied marmot, lives in the

WOODCHUCK OR AMERICAN MARMOT

DESCRIPTION: Length: 18-26 in. Height: 7 in. Weight: 5-7 lbs.
Coloration: *Body sides* and *back:* brown to black; sometimes silver-tipped hairs. *Belly* and *chest:* lighter. *Rump* and *tail:* grizzled. *Underfur:* brown.

DISTRIBUTION: Farm areas east of the Missouri River and north into Canada and parts of Alaska.

PREFERRED HABITAT: Open farm fields and open forest areas.

TABLE FARE: Fair to good depending on the individual animal's diet.

	EXCELLENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR	REMARKS (shot size/load)
HANDGUNS OR RIFLES					
.22 Short				☐	
.22 Long				☐	
.22 Long Rifle			☐		
.22 Magnum		☐			
Centerfire	☐				
Air Gun			☐		
SHOTGUNS					
10-gauge				☐	
12-gauge				☐	
16-gauge				☐	
28-gauge				☐	
20-gauge				☐	
.410				☐	
Archery			☐		
Crossbow			☐		
Slingshot				☐	
Other				☐	

ROCKCHUCK OR YELLOW-BELLIED MARMOT

DESCRIPTION: Length: 24–30 in. Height: 7 in. Weight: 10–12 lbs.
Coloration: *Body sides, front* and *back legs, back, rump, tail,* and *underfur:* brown. *Belly:* buff to yellow. *Chest:* buff/yellow to brown.

DISTRIBUTION: Timberline country of the Rockies and other western mountains.

PREFERRED HABITAT: Rocky, open areas of timberline country close to feeding areas where the ground is kept moist by snowmelt.

TABLE FARE: Good; highly rated by many western hunters. Diet is mostly lush green plants of timberline in the summer.

	EXCELLENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR	REMARKS (shot size/load)
HANDGUNS OR RIFLES					
.22 Short				☐	
.22 Long				☐	
.22 Long Rifle				☐	
.22 Magnum			☐		
Centerfire	☐				
Air Gun				☐	
SHOTGUNS					
10-gauge				☐	
12-gauge				☐	
16-gauge				☐	
28-gauge				☐	
20-gauge				☐	
.410				☐	
Archery				☐	
Crossbow				☐	
Slingshot				☐	
Other				☐	

HOARY MARMOT

Description: Length: 28–30 in. Height: 9 in. Weight: 12–18 lbs. Coloration: *Body sides, front* and *back legs, back:* grey. *Belly* and *chest:* lighter grey. *Rump:* red to brown. *Tail:* darker red to brown. *Underfur:* silver to grey.

Note: Band of dark fur across snout. Sometimes appears grizzled overall.

Distribution: Northwest from Washington through Canada to Alaska.

Preferred habitat: Rocky, open areas of timberline country and some valleys.

Table fare: Good; sought after by many hunters. Diet is lush greens of the high country.

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Remarks (shot size/load)
Handguns or Rifles					
.22 Short				▢	
.22 Long				▢	
.22 Long Rifle			▢		
.22 Magnum			▢		
Centerfire	▢				
Air Gun				▢	
Shotguns					
10-gauge				▢	
12-gauge				▢	
16-gauge				▢	
28-gauge				▢	
20-gauge				▢	
.410				▢	
Archery			▢		
Crossbow			▢		
Slingshot				▢	
Other				▢	

Western high country near the timberline. It is equipped with excellent sight and hearing. The best method for hunting rockchucks is to hunt the slope opposite the one you are on. A quality pair of binoculars is essential because the hikes are often too steep and long to carry a bulky spotting scope. Although there may be rockchucks on the same slope as the hunter, they will not give themselves away at all.

Finding a good population of rocks is an open invitation to some challenging shooting. Unlike woodchucks and prairie dogs which tend to disappear after the first shot, rockchucks will quickly come back out of their holes, allowing the shooter to get two or three more shots. A good hunter should never take more than two or three rockchucks from a group of animals. This will ensure their survival.

A final note about rockchucks. Although I have never eaten one, I have talked with a number of people who have, and they claim the meat is excellent. I see no reason why it wouldn't be, since the animals feed on the rich grasses of the high country.

The hoary marmot is found in Alaska and from Washington up through Canada. Although the hoary marmot's bailiwick is nearly the same as that of the rockchuck, the weather is more severe.

No matter what part of the country you live in, some type of varmint shooting is open to you. Be forewarned, however, once you take up the sport of varmint hunting, you will be hooked for life and you will find yourself dreaming of ever-longer shots and more precise shooting equipment.

6.

RACCOONS, OPOSSUMS, AND PESTS

The surface of Lake Anderson in northern California was smooth as glass and in the fading light I could see fish dimpling the surface. I used the electric trolling motor to nudge the boat around so that I could cast around a dead tree near shore. A fat raccoon caught my attention, and I sat in the boat for several minutes watching the coon poke around in the shallow water for crayfish and then amble up the shoreline to pick through the litter left by some campers.

This was not the first raccoon I'd watched in the wild, but I never tire of watching these animals. The raccoon is one of the most written-about creatures in the wild, and its antics have provided enough material to keep writers busy for many years to come. A family of raccoons can easily foil the most animal-proof lock, find their way into an unlocked car, wreck a cabin, snatch a chicken from a coop without alarming the others, steal a rabbit from a hutch, or raid a quail pen with ease. A raccoon, if cornered, can best the strongest dog by fighting or drowning it. A raccoon living near the suburbs loses all fear of man and will let everyone around know that he intends to be fed even if he has to steal.

There is no part of the nation safe from raccoons except (maybe) the heart of a city. In the colder parts of the nation where the coons must survive long cold winters, they attain weights of thirty pounds or more. In the South, where win-

RACCOON

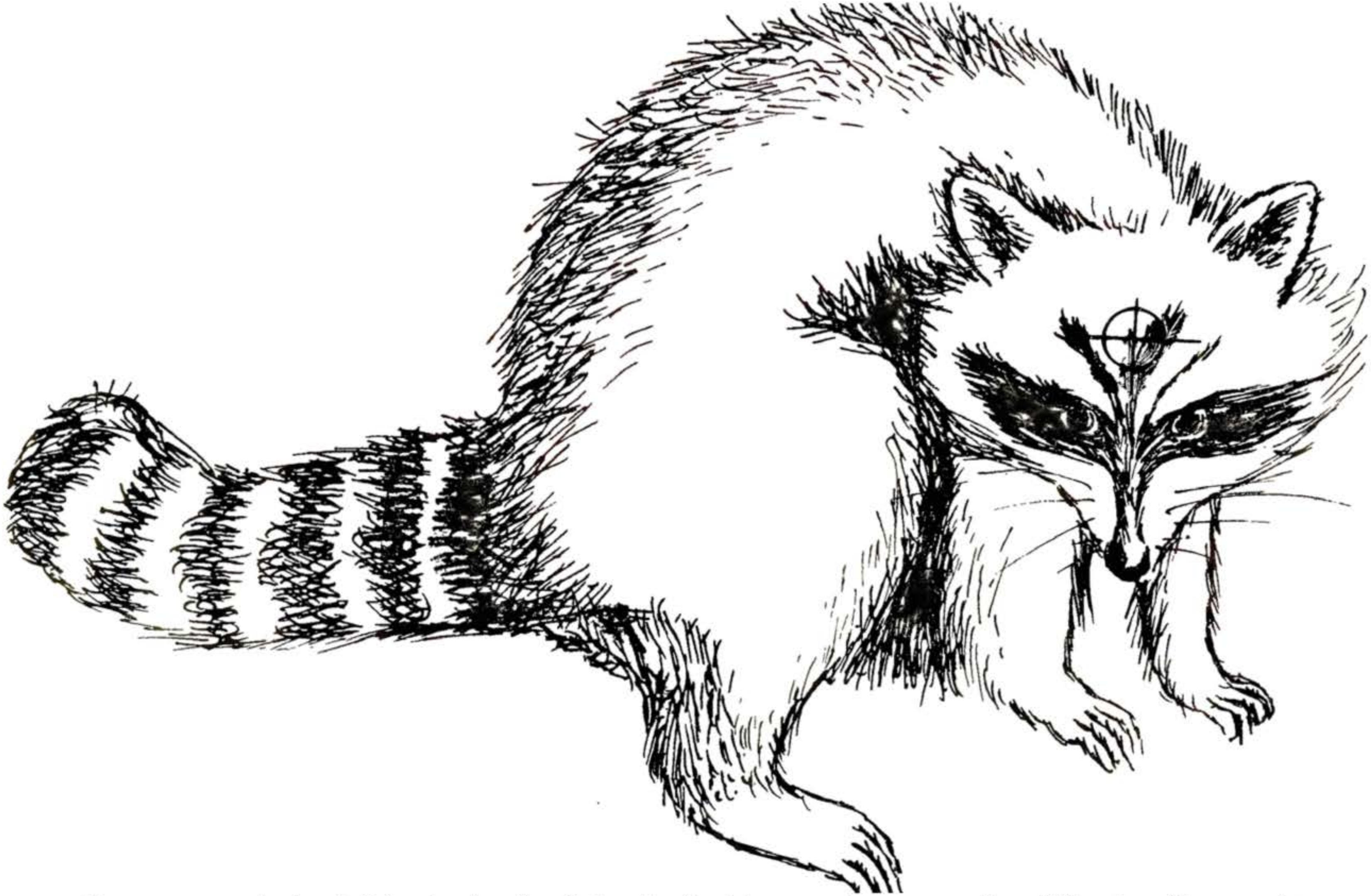
Description: Length: 30–36 in. Height: 12 in. Weight: 10–35 lbs.
Coloration: *Body sides* and *back:* yellow/brown to dark grey. *Front* and *back legs, belly, chest, rump,* and *underfur:* lighter. *Tail:* black rings with black tip.

Distribution: Throughout the nation except for higher elevations of western mountains and arid areas.

Preferred habitat: Woods bordering streams, lakes, or ponds.

Table fare: Good, although not consumed as much today as twenty-five years ago.

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Remarks (shot size/load)
Handguns or Rifles					
.22 Short			☐		
.22 Long			☐		
.22 Long Rifle		☐			
.22 Magnum	☐				
Centerfire			☐		
Air Gun				☐	
Shotguns					
10-gauge				☐	shotguns cause serious pelt damage
12-gauge				☐	
16-gauge				☐	
28-gauge				☐	
20-gauge				☐	
.410				☐	
Archery		☐			
Crossbow	☐				
Slingshot				☐	
Other	☐☐			☐	☐☐ Trapping ☐ Blowgun



Raccoons may be hunted for food or for their pelts. In either case, to ensure a clean kill and avoid a crazed coon, aim for the head only.

ters are mild or rainy, the raccoons are smaller, averaging about ten pounds.

Raccoons are nocturnal animals and are hunted at night. The most popular hunting method is with dogs. Coon dogs, bred for nighttime coon hunting, are turned loose on the trail and begin their baying. Once the dogs have a coon, their baying changes in pitch, volume and even notes. Then the hunters are ready to complete the hunt before returning to someplace warm for a little Jack Daniel's. There are three ways of completing the hunt. The hunters can call the dogs off and let the animal go free to run again some other night. The hunters can kill the coon for its fur and/or meat. Or, as some brave souls do, the hunters can attempt to capture the snarling bundle and transport it someplace where it won't be tempted to raid the chicken coops. In any case, the thrill of the hunt is more important than bagging the animal.

In the past few years there has been a renewed interest in coon furs. A number of hunters have started hunting raccoons without dogs because of the expense of running good dogs. One of the most popular of the new coon-hunting methods is for two hunters to float downstream in a canoe. While one hunter guides the canoe, the other shines a powerful Q-Beam spotlight fitted with a red lens along the shore looking for feeding raccoons. The red light does not affect the coons, and a .22 rifle equipped with a scope is deadly under the red light. In country where there are no streams, some hunters walk through the woods with powerful red-filtered lights scanning the trees for coons.

OPOSSUMS

The only part of opossum hunting that resembles coon hunting is that it takes place at night. Opossum hunting is about as exciting as sitting on a log and watching the grass grow. My first encounter with an opossum was as a youngster in Oklahoma. We were out after coon and were carrying two carbide lamps along a slow-moving creek when we saw a pair of eyes staring at us from a tree limb. One of us was carrying a long bow and we decided to kill the opossum with the bow. It took two arrows to kill the animal. Then we had to figure out what to do with the animal and finally settled on trying to sell it to a hermit who lived along the river and bought carp from us in the summer. We succeeded in collecting a dollar for the opossum.

My next encounter with the opossum was during a real opossum hunt. A friend of mine in California hunted opossum at night, collecting three or four of the animals a year and eating them with great relish. I agreed to go with him just to see what it was like. Armed with a .22 rifle, a half-dozen rounds of long rifle ammunition, and a flashlight, we set off. The hunt lasted about an hour. It consisted of walking through the woods bordering a creek and shining the light into the trees. Finally, my friend spotted an opossum. He handed me the light and told me to keep it aimed at the animal's head while he lined up for the shot. There was one crack of the rifle and the opossum tumbled out of the tree. The .22 left a neat little hole in the animal's head. He quickly gutted the animal, picked it up, and started for home.

"That's it?" I asked.

"Yep, I'll come back and get two or three more before winter sets in and that'll be it for the year. I'll get enough grease from them for cooking and enough meat to last the year. Can't eat a lot at a time."

I never bothered to take him up on the invitation to dine on the opossum we shot.

Unlike the raccoon, which will use every trick in the book to escape, the opossum will sit in a tree and watch you walk right up to it. There just isn't any trick to hunting opossum although in some parts of the South, it is still a great sport.

OPOSSUM

DESCRIPTION: Length: 18 in. Height: 6 in. Weight: 5–8 lbs.
Coloration: *Body sides, front* and *back legs, back, belly, chest,* and *rump:* grey. *Tail:* no fur; grey. *Underfur:* white.

DISTRIBUTION: West Coast and the eastern half of the nation except the far north and arid regions of the West.

PREFERRED HABITAT: Wooded areas bordering fields and streams or other water.

TABLE FARE: Fair; no longer popular as a food source.

	EXCELLENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR	REMARKS (shot size/load)
HANDGUNS OR RIFLES					
.22 Short	☐				
.22 Long	☐				
.22 Long Rifle	☐				
.22 Magnum	☐				
Centerfire				☐	
Air Gun	☐				
SHOTGUNS					
10-gauge				☐	
12-gauge				☐	
16-gauge				☐	
28-gauge		☐			
20-gauge		☐			
.410		☐			
Archery		☐			
Crossbow		☐			
Slingshot			☐		
Other		☐			can be killed with nearly any weapon aimed at the head

I suspect, however, that the opossum hunt is an excuse to have a bunch of friends over for a little nip of spirits when the first autumn frost sets in. That is not to say the opossum is not capable of making life interesting. The opossum is quite capable of breaking into any chicken coop, bird pen, or rabbit hutch and causing a fair share of trouble. Perhaps its greatest claim to fame is its ability to feign death. Some researchers believe that when the animal becomes frightened, it floods its nervous system with a chemical that induces the "death faint." The chemical may also cause a strong odor that chases away predators.

Opossums are now found along the West coast and throughout the eastern two-thirds of the nation, excluding the more arid areas. Like the raccoon, the opossum lives in the woods bordering streams in the farm areas of the nation. It is also quite adaptable to the fringes of suburban America. A curious note about the opossum: It is easy enough to kill with a .22 or the blow of a club to the head. But if you blow it, and the animal is playing dead, you may soon find yourself with a snarling, vicious animal on your hands quite capable of inflicting some serious wounds. The opossum has more teeth in its head than any other animal in North America and while it may initially play dead, at some point it is quite willing and capable of fighting.

PESTS

The occasional raccoon or opossum that makes a pest of itself by raiding a chicken coop or trash can is still, for the most part, a game animal. But we do have our share of animals that are true pests. The three pest animals most often hunted are the brown rat, which makes its home anyplace it can find, the skunk, which ranks up with the rat as a pest, and the porcupine, which destroys millions of dollars worth of trees each year. The rat and the skunk can be found in any part of the nation and are carriers of rabies and plague.

Brown Rat

The brown rat is far and away the worst pest. Rats spread throughout the world by tagging along as close to man as possible. In the winter, rats move closer to people in rural areas, infesting farms and suburbs. In the warmer months, they move back out to the fields to feed on growing crops. In the cities, rats may spend their entire lives living in basements or sewers. Wherever rats are found, the best thing that can be said about them is they are good moving targets.

Rats can be shot with anything capable of developing more than 350 fps velocity. I've shot them with air guns, high-powered rifles, .22 rimfires, shotguns, bows and arrows, and slingshots. One way to get in a little shooting practice is to drive to the town dump at night and, using a Q-beam with a

BROWN RAT, SKUNK, PORCUPINE

DISTRIBUTION: Brown rats and skunks are found throughout the nation from rural areas to cities. Porcupine are found in higher mountain elevations of the West and East.

TABLE FARE: Porcupine can be eaten in a survival situation.

HUNTING ARMS: In built-up areas, either a high-velocity air gun or shotgun should be used on skunks. Rats can be easily killed with an air gun. In rural areas, the .22 magnum is effective on skunks for long-range shots. In a pinch, any weapon can be used on pests.

red light, sit in the back of a pickup and pick off the rats as they feed. In areas close to town, a .22 rimfire may be illegal or dangerous. A high-velocity air gun is the best weapon.

Skunks

The last skunk I sent to the big perfume place in the sky was during a spring bear-hunting camp in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains of the Rockies. It was the last night of camp, and we had our traditional meal of steak and ribs cooked over a hot bed of aspen wood coals. The clients had turned in for the night, leaving the two guides and myself sitting at the campfire shooting the bull. A spitting noise in the darkness caught our attention and we saw a skunk on the edge of the firelight trying to figure out a way to raid the pile of bones we hadn't cleaned up yet.

While one guide grabbed his Q-beam, I pulled my Ruger from the gun rack of the Jeep. While Chuck kept the red beam on the skunk, I tracked it in the scope. Once the skunk was far enough away from camp for a "safe" shot, I settled the crosshairs on the skunk's head and fired. The *only* shot you want to take on a skunk is to the head and then you want to hit the base of the skull so the spine is shattered and the skunk doesn't drive everyone out of the area.

Skunks carry rabies. They are also not afraid of people. Once they venture into a camp area, they are just as likely to stumble into a tent as they are to raid the trash. For this reason, at all of our hunting camps we maintain a .22 rimfire with a scope and a shotgun loaded with loads of slugs and 00 buck. The .22 is for skunks and porcupines, the shotgun for bears.

Skunks will raid chicken houses, trash cans, and anything else they can find. They will also destroy the eggs of game birds such as pheasants, quail, dove, and turkeys as well as any other young they can kill. They eat rats, mice, and their fair share of insects. Like the brown rat, the only good thing about a skunk as far as most sportsmen are concerned is that it is a moving target.

Porcupines

The last of the pests is the porcupine. Unlike the brown rat and the skunk, the porcupine is not commonly found around people. But the porcupine will venture into a camp in the mountains and dine on any leather, plastic, or wood it can find to chew on. Porkys will usually amble away from men but once a porky starts chewing, the only course of action is to destroy the animal or move out. You can't chase one out of the camp. It will run into the bush, hide, and then come back.

As with the skunk, a porky should be shot in the head. A wounded porky will crawl into the brush and present serious problems to everyone in the camp. More than once, a camper has had to pull out painful quills on himself or a family pet because a troublesome porky was wounded and not killed.

7.

PREDATORS

Although raccoon and opossum hunting is losing its popularity, predator hunting is growing at a surprising rate. The important factor contributing to the growth of predator hunting is the use of calls. Even an average caller with a simple varmint call can call the coyote, bobcat, and even the wily fox to within gun range. Some hunters who have discovered the market value of these animals' fur have taken to calling the predators rather than going through the trouble of setting traps during the winter months.

Predator calling is built around the call of the dying rabbit. I've spent enough time in the woods and killed enough rabbits to have heard the sound of a dying rabbit on several occasions. It is an unnerving sound, and the high-pitched scream must be the dinner bell to every predator close enough to hear the sound.

I remember one incident in Oklahoma as a teenager that drove home to me just how effective the call of a dying rabbit is. I was rabbit hunting along the river and spotted a cottontail trying to sneak away from me across a creek that emptied into the river. I shot the rabbit with my .22 rifle but as I worked my way across the creek, I saw the rabbit recover and begin to crawl away. I shot it a second time only to have the animal emit a loud piercing scream as it tumbled down the bank. I could not see the rabbit clearly enough for a third shot but I was sure it would be dead by the time I threaded my way across the creek.

As I neared the bank, I heard the soft whoosh of wind on large wings and turned in time to see a great horned owl diving into the weeds for my rabbit. In seconds, the owl and cottontail were gone. I don't know where the owl came from, but I do know that what attracted him was the dying rabbit's scream of terror. The call works.

I've heard rabbits make the scream several times since then, and each time my nerves stand on edge. I always remember that owl swooping in to steal my cottontail and it reminds me that any predator who comes after a dying rabbit is intent on a free meal. A man is simply in the way, and there are too many reports of predators attacking a hunter using a call to discount them entirely. If you use the call to get your game in close, be careful!

The best hunting method by far is to have two hunters sitting back to back in a blind. This gives 360-degree coverage of the area. Both hunters have to stay alert for any movement and remain motionless while the animal being called in stalks what it thinks is a free meal. You can expect anything to happen once you start calling in predators.

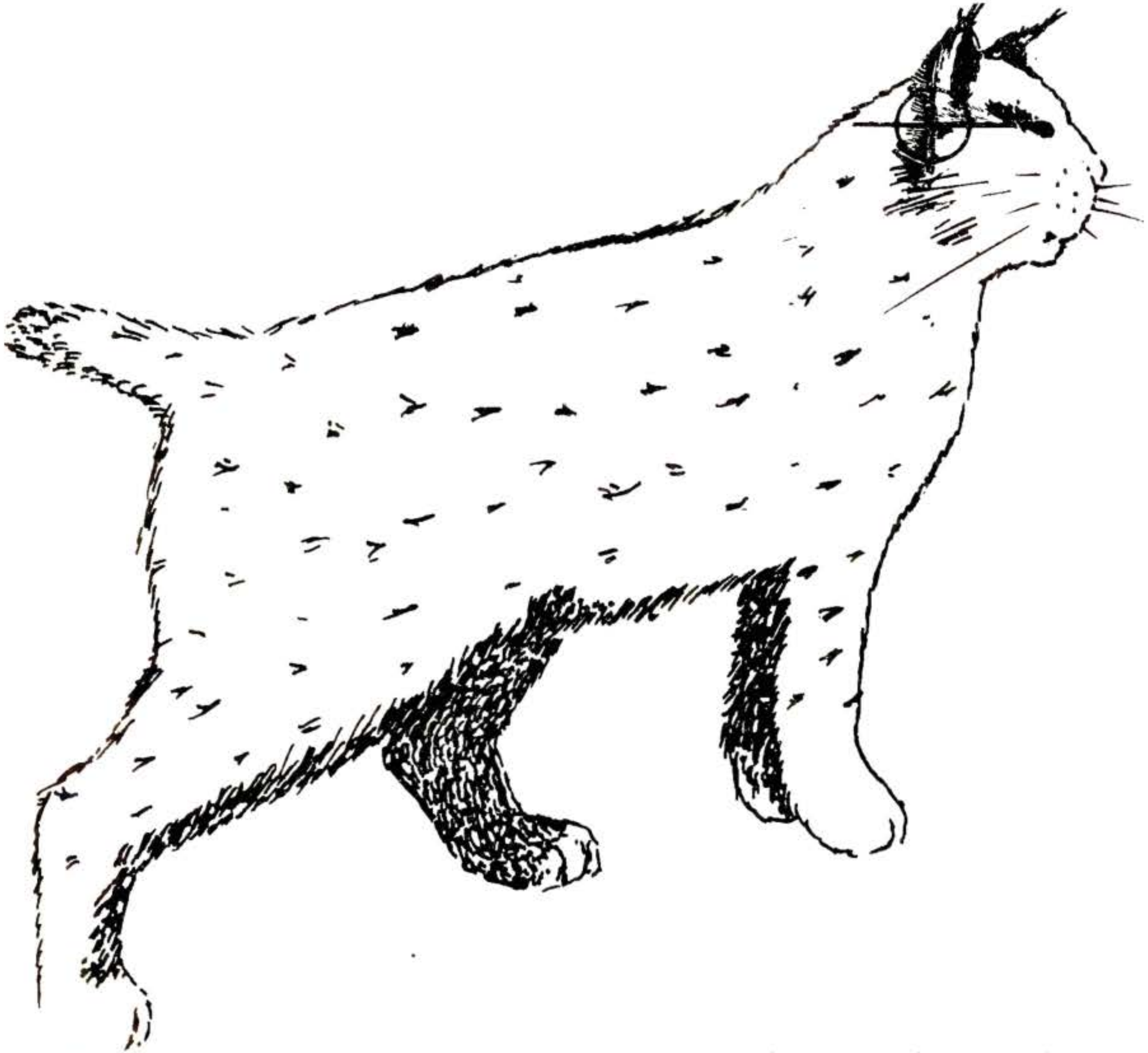
A friend of mine was once calling coyotes one winter evening with a client who hired him because he wanted a full, thick coyote wall rug. They had been calling for perhaps ten minutes without seeing anything when my friend glanced down at his feet. A small fox was crawling through the brush less than a yard away. He watched the fox for a few seconds and then moved his foot. In a flash the animal was gone. His client asked if he had seen anything.

"Nothing but a fox."

"Where?" the client asked.

"About two feet from us, but we're after coyotes."

The lesson is to be prepared. You can obtain good calls in any sporting goods store, and a tape of the proper pitch levels



When hunting predators or other animals for their pelts, aim for a point below the ear and behind the eye for a quick, clean kill and minimal bleeding on the fur.

and length of each note is a good investment. Although you can learn the basic rabbit call in a few minutes, it takes a few sessions to become proficient enough to go out in the woods without the tape to compare your calls to.

Some hunters use tree stands to call from, while others make blinds where they can hide and call. The problem with a blind that is not portable is that you can only use it once or twice in a year. Predators are smart critters, and they only have to be stung by a near miss once to know never to go after a dying rabbit by that clump of bushes again. A better choice is a camouflage net that can be quickly set up between some brush and then taken down when you are through for the day.

A blind set up near a water hole or other area where animals can be counted on to show up day after day is also handy. However, I would not make a habit of using the blind every day. Once or twice a week is the limit.

There are various calls on the market that leave both hands free, ranging from electronic calls to simple mouth calls. The mouth call is superior to anything else and, as far as I am concerned, anyone who takes an electronic call into the wilds for the purpose of hunting is not a sportsman.

COYOTES

In my part of the country, the most popularly hunted predator is the coyote. This is partly due to the fact that the damage done to the spring calf population by coyotes every year is staggering. Despite the pressure from trapping and hunting, however, the animals are capable of maintaining their own. Most of the hunting and trapping is done between the first snow of the year and early spring. This is the time when the pelts are in their prime and offer the best dollar return. A rich, thick silver-tipped coyote fur from the cold mountain areas will fetch as much as $300. The average pelt

COYOTE

DESCRIPTION: Length: 3-4½ ft. Height: 1-2 ft. Weight: 20-30 lbs. Coloration: *Body sides* and *front* and *back legs:* red to grey. *Back:* often looks grizzled. *Belly:* light grey. *Chest:* dark grey. *Rump:* grey. *Tail:* black-tipped. *Underfur:* guard hairs are black-tipped.

DISTRIBUTION: All of the U.S. except for the Southeast, but including Alaska.

PREFERRED HABITAT: Coyotes are capable of adapting to nearly any environment where there is a ready food supply.

TABLE FARE: None

	EXCELLENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR	REMARKS (shot size/load)
HANDGUNS OR RIFLES					
.22 Short				▢	
.22 Long				▢	
.22 Long Rifle			▢		
.22 Magnum	▢				125 yards and under
Centerfire	▢				maximum 100-grain bullet for pelt hunting
Air Gun				▢	
SHOTGUNS					
10-gauge			▢		no shot smaller than 4
12-gauge			▢		
16-gauge			▢		
28-gauge				▢	
20-gauge				▢	
.410				▢	
Archery			▢		
Crossbow			▢		
Slingshot				▢	
Other	▢▢				▢▢ Trapping

will fetch $100 to $125 if the pelt is prime and not full of tears and bullet (or shot) holes.

One of the best coyote hunters I know uses a two-man portable blind about eighteen inches high, seven feet long, and four feet wide. Two hunters lie down in the blind facing opposite directions with their rifles poked through the blind. One man calls, and both watch. When pelt hunting, his rule is to shoot only those coyotes with the best pelts and to leave the younger ones for the following year, unless you are trying to rid an area of coyotes. Since the blind is nothing more than camouflage netting with four metal stakes, he can quickly pull it up and move to a new location once he has bagged several animals or there is no response to the call. When he is ready to move, he travels two or three miles before setting up shop. He maintains that is the only way a hunter can be sure he is in an area where the call has not been heard and the shots (if fired) have not put every animal in the area on alert.

FOX

A popular game animal in this country and abroad as well is the fox. There is good reason for the animal's popularity. The fox is a smart animal and is quite capable of outwitting both the hunter and his dogs. In addition, a good fox pelt can bring thirty-five to seventy-five dollars on the fur market. Like the coyote, the fox can be called with a good predator call, and a fair number of them meet their end responding to a call. While a coyote can be called in and bagged by an inexperienced hunter/caller, it is doubtful whether the fox caller can hope to have any success without hours of practice. The fox may respond to the call and then sit back in a line of brush or trees to observe what is making the racket. But if you are willing to practice with the call, there is no reason

RED FOX

DESCRIPTION: Length: 3–3½ ft   Height: 16 in.   Weight: 5-6 lbs.
Coloration: *Body sides:* deep red to nearly yellow. *Front* and *back legs:* lower part of legs are black. *Back:* darker than body sides. *Belly, chest,* and *rump:* white. *Tail:* black-tipped.

DISTRIBUTION: Nationwide except the East Coast from tip of Florida to North Carolina and eastern side of Rockies into the plains and arid Southwest.

PREFERRED HABITAT: Wooded areas although may be found near built-up areas and in green belts.

TABLE FARE: None

	EXCELLENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR	REMARKS (shot size/load)
HANDGUNS OR RIFLES					
.22 Short			☐		on trapped animals
.22 Long			☐		on trapped animals
.22 Long Rifle		☐			
.22 Magnum	☐				
Centerfire	☐				.222, .223 and similar rounds
Air Gun			☐		high-velocity air guns sometimes used by skilled callers to avoid spooking other game
SHOTGUNS					
10-gauge				☐	
12-gauge			☐		4 or 5 shot; medium loads
16-gauge			☐		
28-gauge			☐		
20-gauge			☐		
.410				☐	
Archery		☐			
Crossbow		☐			
Slingshot				☐	
Other					

GREY FOX

DESCRIPTION: Length: 3-3½ ft. Height: 16 in. Weight: 5-6 lbs.
Coloration: *Body sides* and *back:* grizzled grey. *Front* and *back legs:* rust. *Belly* and *chest:* white. *Underfur:* black-tipped.

DISTRIBUTION: Nationwide except the northern half of country from the Missouri River west to the Pacific Coast.

PREFERRED HABITAT: Wooded areas.

TABLE FARE: None

	EXCELLENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR	REMARKS (shot size/load)
HANDGUNS OR RIFLES					
.22 Short			▢		on trapped animals
.22 Long			▢		on trapped animals
.22 Long Rifle		▢			
.22 Magnum	▢				
Centerfire	▢				.222, .223 and similar rounds
Air Gun			▢		high-velocity air guns used by callers to avoid spooking game
SHOTGUNS					
10-gauge				▢	
12-gauge			▢		4 or 5 shot; medium loads
16-gauge			▢		
28-gauge			▢		
20-gauge			▢		
.410				▢	
Archery		▢			
Crossbow		▢			
Slingshot				▢	
Other					

why you won't be able to call foxes, both red and grey, into gun range.

Another way to hunt the fox, and one that demands the most skill, is to track the animals after a light snow. As soon as the snow stops, the foxes will be out looking for a meal. You must have a lot of patience and skill to find and follow fox tracks in the woods. The trick is to follow the track very slowly and to stop whenever the track heads into an open area. If the fox has been on the hunt for several hours, it will eventually lie down to rest. The fox hunter who has caught the animal napping can get his pelt knowing it was a challenging hunt.

The hunter who can track down and catch a fox napping is rare. The hunter who owns a good foxhound or two is just about as rare, although some foxhounds are still found in the East and South. The American fox hunt differs from the grand European fox hunt in many ways. The most noticeable difference is the fact that we don't go in for all the trappings and social rules of our cousins across the sea. There are some parts of the nation, however, where the Old World hunts are carried on in some form or another. But just as likely, the fox hunt will be a bunch of farmers getting together to "run a fox for a spell." Rarely is the fox killed if the dogs manage to corner one, unless the animal has been raiding hen houses or causing some other problems. More often than not, the fox manages to give the dogs the slip, and the hunters, who have enjoyed good company and a nip from the flask, are able to go home happy and secure in the knowledge that the fox will be on hand for another hunt.

There are actually two species of fox in the United States. The grey fox or tree-climbing fox is the southern cousin of the red fox. The grey is found throughout the southern half of the U.S. from coast to coast but is not considered nearly as much a sport animal as the red.

The red fox is much more commonly hunted than the grey. It is found throughout the nation except for a strip along the eastern side of the Rockies that extends into the Plains states and in Florida and up the coast to North Carolina. Red foxes can be found in suburban developments and are also commonly found in the green belts of some fair-sized communities. Since the fox will eat anything it can find, it has little trouble finding enough food. As it is also very secretive, most people living around the fox family will not be aware of their wilder neighbors.

Both the red and grey fox respond well to the dying rabbit call, but the caller must be experienced. While a poor caller can bring a coyote within range, a poor caller will never see a fox unless it is very young or stupid. Since I have never seen a stupid fox, I doubt a poor caller would either.

CATS

Another animal that can be called in, run with dogs, and even tracked by a very skillful hunter is the bobcat. These small cats, found throughout the nation, are very secretive and exceptionally adept at staying hidden from the eyes of man. The bobcat can be called into gun range from a blind but usually this will happen only if the animal just happens to be in the area. Also, if a hunter knows a bob or two is running in an area, a blind and calling will bring the cat in. The problem with these animals is that your chance of spotting the cat before it spots you is slim.

A far better hunting method for the beautiful cats is to run them with dogs. Like the fox hunt, the bobcat run has achieved a certain popularity. Few of the cats are killed once the dogs get the animal treed. This is because there is really no use for the animal besides its pelt and after a hard chase it is unlikely that the pelt would have any market value.

If you are hunting cats for their pelts and do not want to trap the animals, the best method is to scout an area after

BOBCAT

Description: Length: 2–4 ft. Height: 12–18 in. Weight: 15–25 lbs. Coloration: *Body sides:* red to grey. *Front* and *back legs:* bars or spots. *Back:* red to grey with bars or spots. *Belly:* white. *Chest* and *rump:* lighter than back. *Tail:* dark bars but *not* black-tipped. *Underfur:* pale red or grey.

Distribution: Nationwide except central part of the country from the East Coast to Kansas.

Preferred habitat: Wooded areas with ample cover.

Table fare: None

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Remarks (shot size/load)
Handguns or Rifles					
.22 Short				▢	
.22 Long				▢	
.22 Long Rifle			▢		
.22 Magnum	▢				
Centerfire	▢				in varmint calibers
Air Gun				▢	
Shotguns					
10-gauge				▢	
12-gauge			▢		4 or 5 shot; heavy loads
16-gauge			▢		
28-gauge			▢		
20-gauge			▢		
.410				▢	
Archery			▢		
Crossbow			▢		
Slingshot				▢	
Other	▢▢				▢▢ Trapping

a light snow for cat tracks. Don't try to track the animal, but study the cat's tracks to make sure that he wasn't just passing through (cats make a large circuit every few days). Return to the area a few days later, set up your blind, and begin calling. As I said, chances are that the cat will see you before you see it, but a skillful caller has a good chance of picking up the cat.

No matter which method you choose to hunt the cats, you are in for some excitement. The smaller cats are among the most striking animals in the wild, and because they are so rarely seen, simply catching a glimpse of one is cause for excitement among hunters.

The northern relative of the bobcat is the lynx. A lynx is bigger than a bobcat and its tufted ears are much longer. Although now only common in the far north, the lynx, like many other animals, is expanding its range.

PELTS

Serious predator hunters hunt because they love the sport—the challenge of the predators, which by their nature are capable of outwitting the most experienced hunter. Hunters have also discovered that the pelts of these animals are worth enough to offset a fair share of their annual hunting expenses for other game as well. I know one hunter who has managed to pay for a guided hunt every year for five years with the income from the pelts he takes each year.

Like other serious predator hunters, he has learned the hard way that shotguns, large caliber rifles, and large caliber handguns are destructive to the pelts. Predators, however, are too large for the standard .22 long rifle. The .22 magnum has been proving itself an excellent predator rifle, accurate enough to hit exactly where the hunter aims and powerful enough to penetrate into a vital area without exiting on the far side and making a second, larger hole.

Quite a few hunters use centerfire rifles for predators. With these, the rule is usually to keep the round as small as possible. Most of these shooters are hunters who load their own ammo and have developed a pet load that handles well in their shooting arm. I would not go any larger than a 100-grain bullet with a centerfire, and even then the shooter must be prepared for some shots that damage the pelts. Fur hunters have found that a solid-jacketed bullet is a better choice than a hollow-point or soft-tipped bullet to hold down expansion. Too often, these bullets exit, causing ripping wounds and serious pelt damage.

Pelt hunters have also found that they can get better results by equipping their rifles with good-quality scopes with large objective lenses. The reason is that predators are often shot in the very early morning or late at night (or, where legal, under red lights). In either case, many of the varmint scopes are too powerful for effective pelt shots because they do not gather enough of the dim light to ensure well-placed shots. One of the newer scopes on the market being snapped up by pelt hunters is the Bausch & Lomb riflescope. This scope has a 40mm objective lens and was designed for low-light shooting.

An important consideration in hunting predators for their pelts is field handling. I was with a wildlife officer several years ago checking a game management area when a local trapper came by. He had had a fairly good day and he had two coyotes and a fox in the back of his Jeep. The three animals had to be killed with a handgun and each bullet hole was plugged with cotton wadding to prevent blood damage. The animals were wrapped in burlap bags until he could get home and skin them.

If you are hunting animals for their pelts, it is a good idea to carry a small kit with you. In addition to some cotton to stuff into the bullet hole to stop blood seepage, have on hand a quart of water and some rags to wash blood off the pelt. A few burlap bags to wrap the animal in while transporting it are handy because the bouncing around the animal can receive in the back of a pickup or trunk of a car can damage the pelt.

If you have never skinned an animal for its pelt before, don't even attempt it. Find someone who has experience in that type of skinning process. Depending on the animal and the needs of the fur buyer, the pelt must be prepared in a certain way or you have wasted your time and the animal.

Regardless of why you hunt predators and how, you will no doubt find it an exciting and challenging sport. Even if your only purpose is to call the animal close enough for a photograph, it will test your skill to the very limit. The old saying "crafty as a fox" is based on sound hunting experience.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I have not included the wolf in this section because it is not hunted in the lower forty-eight states and its future is still in question. Not enough is known about the wolf (unlike other predators I have covered) to ensure its survival if hunting is permitted.

The lynx is also not covered because it is found in Canada and only a few areas of the lower forty-eight states. However, I have seen lynx outside of the areas they are known to be, and I believe they are expanding their range. Since their numbers are still limited in the U.S., they should be left to reproduce and expand.

8.

UPLAND BIRDS

There is no doubt in my mind that the most popular form of hunting in America is bird hunting. Every year millions of birds are bagged by hunters, and several million more shots are fired over, under, and around the birds. In Oklahoma, for example, 2,063,432 quail are killed each year. In Iowa, hunters knock down 1,430,000 pheasants, and in Wisconsin, 1,186,300 grouse are taken! Although the numbers seem staggering, remember this important fact: The number of birds killed each year by hunters is a carefully controlled harvest. If the birds were not killed by hunters, natural death from freezing and starvation would result.

This book could not hope to go into great detail on the various species of birds hunted and the methods for hunting them. All I can hope to do in this chapter and the following chapters on bird hunting is provide you with enough information to help you get into this exciting shooting sport. In all bird hunting, the trick is to learn about the birds in your area. By knowing where to go, what the bird's habits are, and the best methods of hunting in your area, the chances of your putting some quality eating on the table are better than average.

I have stated several times in this book that given only one gun, I would take the 12-gauge pump. With it, I can hunt anything from rabbits to deer. There is no bird in the country that cannot be hunted with the 12-gauge simply by using the

Dove are one of the most popular game birds in North America.

proper load and making sure the choke is correct for that type of hunting, or adapting your shooting to the restrictions of the choke. Don't start off bird hunting with a .410 shotgun because you think the lighter kick will make the sport more enjoyable. Shooting a sitting cottontail with a .410 is one thing, but knocking a dove out of the sky with a .410 is something left to the experts. Even the experts will tell you a .410 is the wrong gun. As I deal with each bird in the pages to follow, check the species information charts for the hunting arm that has proven itself in the field.

DOVE

The opening day of dove season is a social event. Over the past ten years, dove hunting has gained millions of new followers, to the delight of the companies making and selling shotguns and ammunition. I don't think anyone goes dove hunting seriously expecting anything more than a good time. One of my favorite stories is about Bob Poos, the former editor of *Soldier of Fortune* magazine. Bob and I were hunting dove in Fort Carson, Colorado. Bob dropped a bird, stuffed it in his shoulder game bag, and quickly dropped another bird. When he opened his game bag to deposit the second bird, the first one flew out and he had to shoot it a second time.

"Tough birds," was Bob's only comment.

I don't know if "tough" is the proper description. Dove are hard to kill because they are small and fast. After the first day of the season, dove stop flying a straight line and begin flying a pattern not unlike an F-4 trying to dodge a SAM over North Vietnam. Dove are built for evasive flying. I have seen dove approach the field in formation and then break with the first sighting of a hunter into a climbing, dodging, zigzag pattern that brought every bird through the wall of shot thrown up at them.

MOURNING DOVE

DESCRIPTION: Length: 12–13 in. Weight: 4-5 oz. Wingspan: 18-19 in. Tail: 6-8 in.

Coloration: *Wings, sides,* and *neck:* blue-grey. *Breast:* grey. *Tail:* olive brown with white. *Belly:* buffed blue-grey. *Head:* blue-grey with blue around eyes. *Other markings:* black spots on wings.

DISTRIBUTION: Nationwide

PREFERRED HABITAT: Requires water and graveling areas.

TABLE FARE: Excellent

	EXCELLENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR	REMARKS (shot size/load)
HANDGUNS OR RIFLES					
.22 Short				☐	
.22 Long				☐	
.22 Long Rifle				☐	
.22 Magnum				☐	
Centerfire				☐	
Air Gun				☐	
SHOTGUNS					
10-gauge				☐	
12-gauge	☐				6, 7½, 8 or 9 shot; light loads
16-gauge	☐				same
28-gauge	☐				same
20-gauge	☐				same
.410				☐	
Archery				☐	
Crossbow				☐	
Slingshot				☐	
Other				☐	

"Hank" delivers a quail to hunter Chuck Carothers.

WHITE-WINGED DOVE

DESCRIPTION: Length: 12 in. Weight: 6-7 oz. Wingspan: 19-20 in. Tail: 5-7 in.

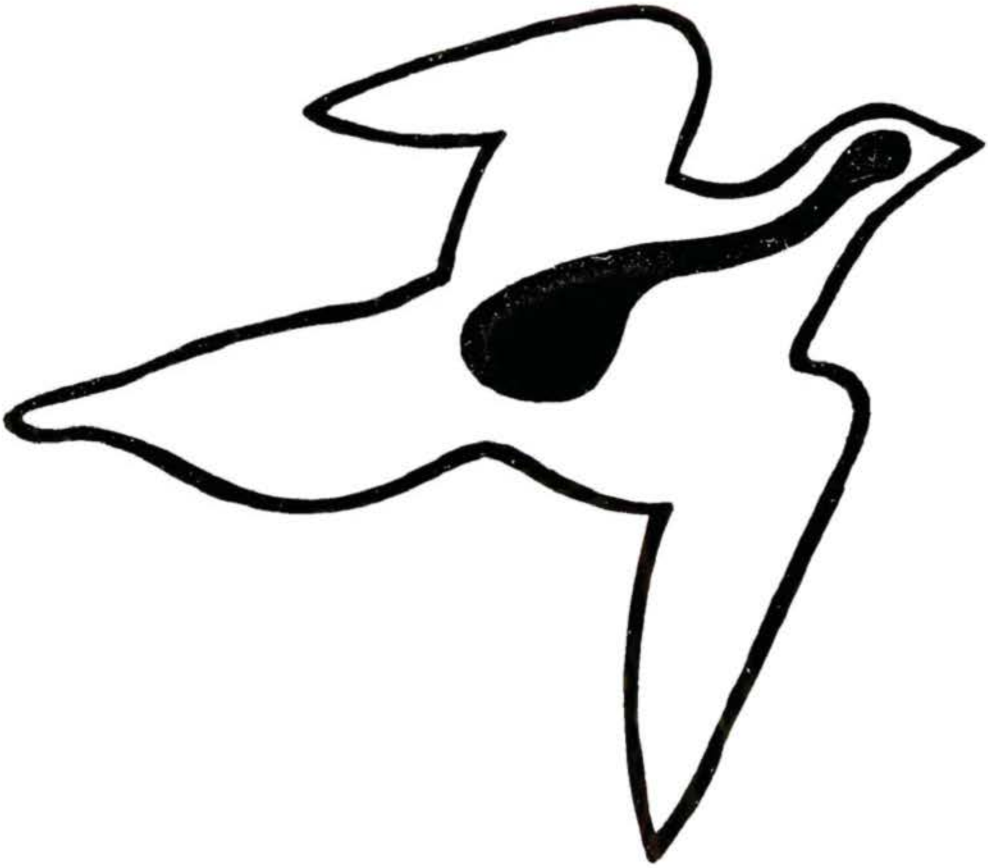
Coloration: *Wings:* white band with black. *Sides* and *breast:* olive brown. *Tail:* olive brown with black and white stripe. *Belly, neck,* and *head:* light purple.

DISTRIBUTION: Arid Southwest.

PREFERRED HABITAT: Dry, arid country.

TABLE FARE: Excellent

	EXCELLENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR	REMARKS (shot size/load)
HANDGUNS OR RIFLES					
.22 Short				☐	
.22 Long				☐	
.22 Long Rifle				☐	
.22 Magnum				☐	
Centerfire				☐	
Air Gun				☐	
SHOTGUNS					
10-gauge				☐	
12-gauge	☐				6, 7½, 8 or 9 shot; light loads
16-gauge	☐				same
28-gauge	☐				same
20-gauge	☐				same
.410				☐	
Archery				☐	
Crossbow				☐	
Slingshot				☐	
Other				☐	



Doves are not only fast on the wing, but their kill area is very small. The kill zone is in black; the cripple zone is grey.

There are two ways to hunt dove. The most popular is to find a "fly way" which is nothing more than a route flown by the birds between their roosting, feeding, graveling, and watering areas. The hunters set themselves up early in the morning and in the afternoon and wait for the birds to fly past. This method is called "pass shooting."

Another method is "jump shooting." Not unlike quail hunting, jump-shooting dove is tough. The idea is to walk up close enough to the birds in a field for a shot. However, after the first day of the season, the birds are skittish of man. More often than not, the birds will take to the air a hundred yards or more distant. I would rather find a water hole and hunker down to wait for the birds to come in. At this close range, I will wound fewer birds.

There are two species of dove found in North America. The least known of the two is the white-winged dove. White-wings are found in Mexico and the central U.S., especially Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas. The white-winged dove has a shorter tail than the mourning dove, the other North American species, and is slightly heavier at six to seven ounces.

Of the two dove species, the mourning dove is much more agile in the air and is more apt to change routes to and from water. The white-wing can be counted on to fly the same route, regardless of hunting pressure. The white-winged dove, however, can hit 55 mph in level flight and is thus fast enough to outfly the majority of gunners in the field.

The mourning dove, more widespread than the white-wing, is found in all of the lower forty-eight states. However, it is not a game bird in all of the states. In quite a few states, the dove is grouped with the song birds and is protected. In those states where the bird is legal game, the national total of dove killed each year by hunters is a staggering twenty-plus million. Research has proven, however, that even if hunters were not bagging these birds, their chances of surviving the winter are slim at best. As many as 70 percent die each year regardless of the hunting pressure. Since these birds reproduce in numbers high enough to ensure that the 70-percent loss will be replaced each year, hunting helps to ensure the species' survival by harvesting enough of the birds to avoid starvation and disease that can sweep through any wildlife group when the population is too large.

Finding an area to hunt mourning dove is fairly simple. All you need to do is drive along a few back country roads until you spot the birds. If it is private land, contact the landowner and obtain permission to hunt. You can try jump shooting the birds or if they are flying through, pass shooting. Many hunters have discovered that after the first few days of the season, a dozen or more dove decoys set out on a fence or around a water hole will bring in birds that are gun-shy. As the season drags on and the birds become more difficult to get close to, you will find yourself making more use of decoys, setting up camouflage dove blinds, and going to other lengths to get shots. Even with the best blind, a fair number of decoys, and many birds, chances are you will miss more birds than you hit. With dove, that is the sport, and we return to the field every year for more.

PIGEONS

At one time, the passenger pigeon was a species commonly seen in this country but has long since disappeared from our nation. It was not sport hunting that destroyed the bird, but meat hunters who supplied the East with passenger pigeons. The dove is part of the pigeon family but because the hunting technique differs, it is grouped by itself. Other species that are hunted today are the band-tailed pigeon and the domestic pigeon that has gone wild.

In many parts of the country, the hunter must have a special permit to hunt band-tailed pigeons. This is one

BAND-TAILED PIGEON

DESCRIPTION: Length: 16 in. Weight: 12 oz. Wingspan: 16 in. Tail: 6 in. Coloration: *Wings:* grey to blue to black. *Sides:* green and brown. *Breast* and *head:* purple to brown. *Tail:* black to grey band. *Belly:* grey. *Neck:* green.

DISTRIBUTION: Western U.S. starting at the Rocky Mountains.

PREFERRED HABITAT: Arid areas.

TABLE FARE: Excellent

	EXCELLENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR	REMARKS (shot size/load)
HANDGUNS OR RIFLES					
.22 Short				▢	
.22 Long				▢	
.22 Long Rifle				▢	
.22 Magnum				▢	
Centerfire				▢	
Air Gun				▢	
SHOTGUNS					
10-gauge				▢	
12-gauge	▢				6, 7½, 8 or 9 shot; light loads
16-gauge	▢				same
28-gauge	▢				same
20-gauge	▢				same
.410				▢	
Archery				▢	
Crossbow				▢	
Slingshot				▢	
Other				▢	

WILD (DOMESTIC) PIGEON

DISTRIBUTION: Nationwide

PREFERRED HABITAT: Old buildings, rocky cliffs, bridges.

TABLE FARE: Fair to excellent depending on age of bird.

	EXCELLENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR	REMARKS (shot size/load)
HANDGUNS OR RIFLES					
.22 Short		▢			
.22 Long		▢			
.22 Long Rifle		▢			
.22 Magnum		▢			
Centerfire				▢	
Air Gun		▢			high-velocity
SHOTGUNS					
10-gauge			▢		6, 7½, 8 or 9 shot; light loads
12-gauge	▢				
16-gauge	▢				
28-gauge	▢				
20-gauge	▢				
.410		▢			
Archery		▢			flu-flu arrows
Crossbow		▢			
Slingshot		▢			
Other	▢				easily trapped

method of ensuring that the birds are not overhunted. Usually the permit is free and requires nothing more than visiting or writing the nearest wildlife office. Band-tails are fairly common throughout the West and migrate each year from the northwest to the southwest with the advent of winter.

It is not always easy to find band-tails because they dine on a variety of food: acorns and nuts as well as berries and grain. The one sure method of locating the birds is to find a water supply. Band-tails return to the same area year after year so once a hunter has located where the birds are feeding and/or watering, he should make a note of it. Then he can station himself near the water or food where the birds will fly within range. Before setting out to hunt band-tailed pigeons, be sure to check local regulations. Some areas are closed to band-tail hunting if it is not clear that the population can support hunting.

While the band-tailed pigeon is closely regulated, there is another breed of pigeon that is fair game for hunters in most areas and that is the domestic pigeon gone wild. Flocks of these birds are found around old barns, along bridges, and in urban and suburban areas across the nation. These birds are considered pests in most areas and there are no hunting seasons.

There are a number of rock cliffs a few miles from my home, and pigeons have taken up living there in the early spring through fall until the cold drives the birds back to town where they live in the tops of buildings. During the fall, these birds make good targets and are excellent table fare. These birds can also be hunted around old barns and ranches where they can roost and just about any other building where they are protected from the weather. To find a place to hunt these birds, cruise down a country road until you spot the pigeons and then secure permission to hunt them from the owner. Most ranchers are more than happy to have someone reduce the pigeon population around the ranch. The birds raid stored grain and spread acid waste that can transmit various diseases to domestic fowl.

One way to hunt these birds is to climb into a barn with a high-velocity rifle and pick the birds off as they come into the barn. I've loaned my air guns to several ranchers who quietly cleaned out their pigeons without risking the lives of other fowl or livestock.

GROUSE

The opening of logging roads through remote areas of national forest land has helped to open up grouse hunting in the West. Twenty or thirty years ago, only the most determined hunters or those able to trek deep into the forest were able to hunt forest grouse. Grouse hunting outside of the forest was somewhat limited. Wildlife managers have been very successful in grouse management, and the new access to forests has made grouse hunting a sport enjoyed by growing numbers of hunters. The various species of grouse hunted in this country are: dusky blue grouse (the sooty grouse is a subspecies), spruce grouse, ruffled grouse, sharp-tailed grouse, and the sage grouse. At the right time of year, any of these birds offers a fine meal, and a single bird can feed two people.

Sage Grouse

The largest of the grouse is the sage grouse. As its name suggests, the sage grouse is confined to the sagebrush areas of the West, including Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, Idaho, Utah, Nevada, Oregon, Washington, Nebraska, and the Dakotas. The destruction of the sagebrush country has seriously affected the population of these birds, but their number has stabilized in country that has been left unplowed or paved.

Sage grouse hunting is a walking affair. Hunters locate an

SAGE GROUSE

DESCRIPTION: Length: 30 in. Weight: 7 lbs. Wingspan: 36 in.
Coloration: *Wings* and *sides:* grey to brown. *Breast* and *tail:* white. *Belly:* black. *Neck* and *head:* brown.

DISTRIBUTION: Sagebrush country of the West.

PREFERRED HABITAT: Open sagebrush country with few road crossings.

TABLE FARE: Excellent up to the first heavy snow.

	EXCELLENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR	REMARKS (shot size/load)
HANDGUNS OR RIFLES					
.22 Short		☐			where legal
.22 Long		☐			same
.22 Long Rifle		☐			same
.22 Magnum		☐			same
Centerfire				☐	same
Air Gun		☐			high-velocity air gun where legal
SHOTGUNS					
10-gauge			☐		5, 6 or 7½ shot; medium loads
12-gauge	☐				
16-gauge	☐				
28-gauge	☐				
20-gauge	☐				
.410				☐	
Archery		☐			
Crossbow		☐			
Slingshot			☐		
Other				☐	

area where few roads cross the sage country and begin walking. A dog can be handy to pick up downed birds. In areas where there is little hunting pressure, the birds will often walk rather than fly away from the hunter. If they have been shot at, often they will fly a few hundred yards, set their wings, and then glide to a landing. A careful hunter can then walk back up to the birds for a second try. Hunting season for these birds usually begins in late summer or early fall and during this time of year, the meat is still top table fare. Once the snow falls, the birds turn to a diet of sage rather than the greens they ate during the summer, and their meat becomes bitter.

Blue Grouse

For my money, the most difficult and demanding bird to hunt is the blue grouse. Although the opening of national forests has brought blue grouse hunting to more hunters, they still must traverse the steep sides of ridges and mountains in search of these birds. Blue grouse are poor flyers, relying on steep hillsides to escape danger. When they feel threatened, the birds spread their wings and glide downhill to safety. A blue grouse on the ground will also walk away from a hunter and hide under the lower branches of a spruce or pine tree.

Still, the rewards of blue grouse hunting are great. In the early fall, when the birds are feeding on berries and greens, their meat is sweet and tasty. After the snow begins to pile up, the birds turn to pine needles for food, and their flesh tastes the same as a pine cone.

Hunting for blue grouse is possible with every kind of weapon carried. I know some hunters who carry slingshots and pick the grouse off tree limbs while they are out on a deer or elk hunt. Other hunters use a .22 handgun to pick off the birds. I've always felt that this was a little disrespectful to what I consider a fine game bird. Personally, I like to

BLUE (SOOTY) GROUSE

DESCRIPTION: Length: 22 in. Weight: 3.5 lbs. Wingspan: 28 in.
Coloration: *Wings, sides,* and *head:* grey-brown. *Breast* and *belly:* blue-grey. *Tail:* black with grey band. *Neck:* grey-brown; white throat. *Other markings:* feathered legs.

DISTRIBUTION: Mountain areas of the West.

PREFERRED HABITAT: Mountainous, forest country up to timberline.

TABLE FARE: Excellent early in the season.

	EXCELLENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR	REMARKS (shot size/load)
HANDGUNS OR RIFLES					
.22 Short		▢			
.22 Long		▢			
.22 Long Rifle		▢			
.22 Magnum		▢			
Centerfire				▢	
Air Gun		▢			high-velocity
SHOTGUNS					
10-gauge			▢		5, 6 or 7½ shot; medium loads
12-gauge	▢				
16-gauge	▢				
28-gauge	▢				
20-gauge	▢				
.410				▢	
Archery		▢			
Crossbow		▢			
Slingshot		▢			
Other				▢	

go grouse hunting with my 12-gauge pump, walking the ridges and bottoms for birds.

An interesting note about the blue grouse: increased hunting of the birds seems to have little effect on their population. However, as soon as an area is developed for skiing or other "recreational" purposes, the birds disappear. The blue grouse is easy prey for predators, which is why it lives in the high, thick timber country of the West. But development and the waste that accompanies it attracts various predators, which quickly wipe out the young grouse.

Sharp-tailed Grouse

The mountain states are triple blessed: The blue grouse is found throughout the high country; the sage country is home to the sage grouse; and in the brushlands, there is the sharp-tailed grouse. Sharp-tailed grouse are good fliers and more willing to flush in gun range than either the blue or sage grouse. When the bird feels it is high enough, it stops flapping its wings, sets them, and begins a long, gentle glide to safety. As a table bird, the sharp-tail is unbeatable. Wherever sharp-tails are found, they are eagerly hunted because of the delicious flavor of their meat.

The range of the prairie chicken in some parts of the West is the same as the sharp-tailed grouse. The sharp-tail looks quite a bit like the rarer prairie chickens, and hunters have to be very careful not to confuse the two bird types. There are parts of the country where prairie chickens are hunted, but they are not important game birds outside of these small isolated areas. The sharp-tail covers more than a dozen of the western states.

Like the sage grouse, the sharp-tailed grouse is hunted on foot. The difference is that the sharp-tail is found in thick brush country. I've often found the birds in the border areas between sage country and higher pine country. One of the problems with hunting them is getting through the brush.

SHARP-TAILED GROUSE

DESCRIPTION: Length: 18-19 in. Weight: 2 lbs. Wingspan: 20 in. Coloration: *Wings:* dark brown with white. *Sides, breast, tail, belly,* and *neck:* white with black spots. *Head:* same with yellow comb on eyes. *Other markings:* spots appear as darts.

DISTRIBUTION: Northcentral to northwest plains areas.

PREFERRED HABITAT: Brush areas between forest and grasslands.

TABLE FARE: Excellent before first heavy snow.

	EXCELLENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR	REMARKS (shot size/load)
HANDGUNS OR RIFLES					
.22 Short				☐	
.22 Long				☐	
.22 Long Rifle				☐	
.22 Magnum				☐	
Centerfire				☐	
Air Gun				☐	
SHOTGUNS					
10-gauge			☐		6, 7½ or 8 shot; medium loads
12-gauge	☐				
16-gauge	☐				
28-gauge	☐				
20-gauge	☐				
.410				☐	
Archery				☐	
Crossbow				☐	
Slingshot				☐	
Other				☐	

RUFFLED GROUSE

Description: Length: 19 in. Weight: 2 lbs. Wingspan: 25 in. Tail: 5-6 in. Coloration: Grey to various shades of brown. Coloration varies greatly depending on region.

Distribution: Woodlands of northern half of the nation, excluding the steep mountains of the Rockies.

Preferred habitat: Forest with fringe or edge areas.

Table fare: Excellent

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Remarks (shot size/load)
Handguns or Rifles					
.22 Short				☐	
.22 Long				☐	
.22 Long Rifle				☐	
.22 Magnum				☐	
Centerfire				☐	
Air Gun				☐	
Shotguns					
10-gauge				☐	
12-gauge	☐				6, 7½ or 8 shot; medium loads
16-gauge	☐				
28-gauge	☐				
20-gauge	☐				
.410				☐	
Archery				☐	
Crossbow				☐	
Slingshot				☐	
Other				☐	

A dog is worth his weight in gold if he can get into the brush and flush the birds out.

Spruce Grouse

The spruce grouse is often called the fool's hen, and for good reason. These birds often allow a man to walk right up to them. They seem to have no fear of man whatsoever! The opening of national forest areas may prove to be the downfall of the spruce grouse unless steps are taken to protect them. Not only do the birds lack the survival fear of man, they cannot live with man. The intrusion of man into the environment of the spruce grouse destroys the bird's nesting areas and brings predators with him that dine on the young. In addition, they are too easily hunted. I am sure, however, that wildlife managers will take steps to protect these birds as more land is opened. With luck, the movement to ban all vehicle traffic in many lands of the West will help protect these birds.

Spruce grouse inhabit the thick conifer forests of the West. While they may be near a small forest opening, a park, or along a game trail, the birds are seldom found in open areas.

Like the other grouse, the spruce should only be hunted in the early season before the snow forces the birds onto a diet of pine needles. These birds can be hunted with nearly any firearm or other weapon. And since they can be approached so closely, there is no reason for any shot other than a clean head shot.

Ruffled Grouse

There is one bird that has been the subject of more fiction (and even some fact) than any other bird. It is the ruffled grouse. These birds are found in a northern band from Alaska to New England and are the most sought-after type of grouse. Unlike other grouse, which may or may not fly to safety, the ruffled grouse takes off in a roar of wings and feathers that sends even the calmest hunter into a frenzy of excitement. Once the bird has the hunter thoroughly rattled, it puts on the finishing touch by twisting, turning, dodging, and zipping through the trees without any pattern, before finally setting its wings and gliding to safety. It is not surprising to find that most hunters who chase this bird are overcome with joy when they knock one down!

Ruffled grouse feed through the summer on bugs, berries, nuts, and greens, thereby having an excellent flavor that is famous. They have another trait that makes them rather special in the woods. Ruffled grouse go out of their way to feed on fermented berries in the fall and can become staggering drunk. Stories of ruffled grouse flying into walls or stumbling around trying to escape a hunter are legion.

After the snow blankets the ground and covers their primary food supplies, ruffled grouse, like their cousins, turn to a diet of pine or spruce needles that makes their flesh "piney" tasting. Until that time, there is no upland bird of the forest that is as eagerly sought. The birds are very difficult to hit, however, and the novice grouse hunter should prepare himself for the large number of birds he will miss before that first grouse falls to the ground.

PTARMIGAN

There are three species of ptarmigan: the willow, rock, and white-tailed. Of the three, the white-tailed is the most widespread in the lower forty-eight states. The problem with this bird is not its numbers, which are stable and healthy, but reaching it. The season for these birds is limited, and they are high-country birds found near and above timberline in the mountains of the West.

Once in timberline country, the hunter must search the meadows and draws where willows and grass grow. The birds

WHITE-TAILED PTARMIGAN

(Neither the willow nor rock ptarmigan are found in large enough numbers in the lower forty-eight states for serious hunting)

Description: Length: 13 in. Weight: 12 oz. Wingspan: 18 in.
Coloration: *Wings, sides, breast, tail,* and *belly:* white. *Neck* and *head:* brown.
Note: Winter coloration is all white.

Distribution: Timberline areas of the Rockies from northern New Mexico to Canada.

Preferred habitat: Meadows of timberline areas.

Table fare: Excellent

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Remarks (shot size/load)
Handguns or Rifles					
.22 Short			▢		
.22 Long			▢		
.22 Long Rifle			▢		
.22 Magnum			▢		
Centerfire				▢	
Air Gun			▢		high-velocity
Shotguns					
10-gauge				▢	
12-gauge	▢				6, 7½, 8 or 9 shot; light loads
16-gauge	▢				
28-gauge	▢				
20-gauge	▢				
.410			▢		
Archery			▢		
Crossbow			▢		
Slingshot			▢		
Other				▢	

will flush and, if not shot over, will circle and return to where they were flushed. The meat of these birds is a rare treat before the snows. Many hunters leave their shotguns behind and take high-velocity air guns or .22 rimfires into the mountains so that they can take head shots and ensure no damage to the meat.

The white-tailed ptarmigan is about the same size as the dove. When hunted with a shotgun, a dove load is more than enough to bring this bird down.

All three of the ptarmigan have two color phases. In the summer, the birds are shades of brown and grey which turn white in the winter. Only the white-tailed ptarmigan turns completely white. The others keep some black and brown feathers even in winter.

The willow ptarmigan is the largest of the three birds, but it is found in only a small area, mainly parts of New England. The rock ptarmigan is found only in Canada and Alaska. Like the willow and white-tailed ptarmigan, it feeds on buds, flowers, and leaves during the warmer months and turns to conifer needles when the greens are gone. All three birds must be hunted early in the season before their meat loses its delicate flavor and turns tough and "piney."

PARTRIDGE

A game bird that is gaining in popularity and is easier to hunt than ptarmigan is the partridge. Actually, there are two partridge hunted in the United States today, and both species are imports. The grey or Hungarian partridge was imported from Germany, Russia, and Hungary, and has gained a solid foothold in the northern plains up into Canada. These birds are not good flushing birds and are very adept at running for cover when pressured by hunters. In Europe, the birds are hunted from blinds and drivers force the birds to take to the wing.

GREY OR HUNGARIAN PARTRIDGE

DESCRIPTION: Length: 14 in. Weight: 14 oz. Wingspan: 16 in.
Coloration: *Wings:* brown with white spots. *Sides:* grey with cinnamon tips. *Breast:* large cinnamon patch. *Tail:* cinnamon brown. *Belly* and *neck:* light grey. *Head:* dark grey.

DISTRIBUTION: High plains of the northern U.S.

PREFERRED HABITAT: Grasslands and brush areas of the high plains.

TABLE FARE: Excellent

	EXCELLENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR	REMARKS (shot size/load)
HANDGUNS OR RIFLES					
.22 Short				☐	
.22 Long				☐	
.22 Long Rifle				☐	
.22 Magnum				☐	
Centerfire				☐	
Air Gun				☐	
SHOTGUNS					
10-gauge				☐	
12-gauge	☐				6, 7½, 8 or 9 shot; light loads
16-gauge	☐				
28-gauge	☐				
20-gauge	☐				
.410				☐	
Archery				☐	
Crossbow				☐	
Slingshot				☐	
Other				☐	

CHUKAR PARTRIDGE

DESCRIPTION: Length: 15 in. Weight: 25 oz. Wingspan: 17 in.
Coloration: *Wings:* dark brown. *Sides:* white with black-barred feathers. *Breast:* white. *Tail* and *neck:* grey. *Belly:* cream. *Head:* black, grey. *Other markings:* a black band extends through the eye and across the chest.

DISTRIBUTION: Arid sections of the western U.S. but is expanding its range.

PREFERRED HABITAT: Arid foothills of mountain regions resembling Himalayan foothills.

TABLE FARE: Excellent

	EXCELLENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR	REMARKS (shot size/load)
HANDGUNS OR RIFLES					
.22 Short				☐	
.22 Long				☐	
.22 Long Rifle				☐	
.22 Magnum				☐	
Centerfire				☐	
Air Gun				☐	
SHOTGUNS					
10-gauge				☐	
12-gauge	☐				6, 7½, 8 or 9 shot; light loads
16-gauge	☐				
28-gauge	☐				
20-gauge	☐				
.410				☐	
Archery				☐	
Crossbow				☐	
Slingshot				☐	
Other				☐	

A more interesting game bird that has been imported is the Chukar partridge. These birds are destined to become a major game bird throughout the West because they do not compete with any existing game bird for food or cover. Chukars prefer the high, dry country of the West where rattlesnakes are found. These birds will flush and fly directly to a nearby hillside where they can hide in a jumble of rocks and shrubs. Once the partridge has hidden, however, it can be walked up to a second time and flushed again for another shot.

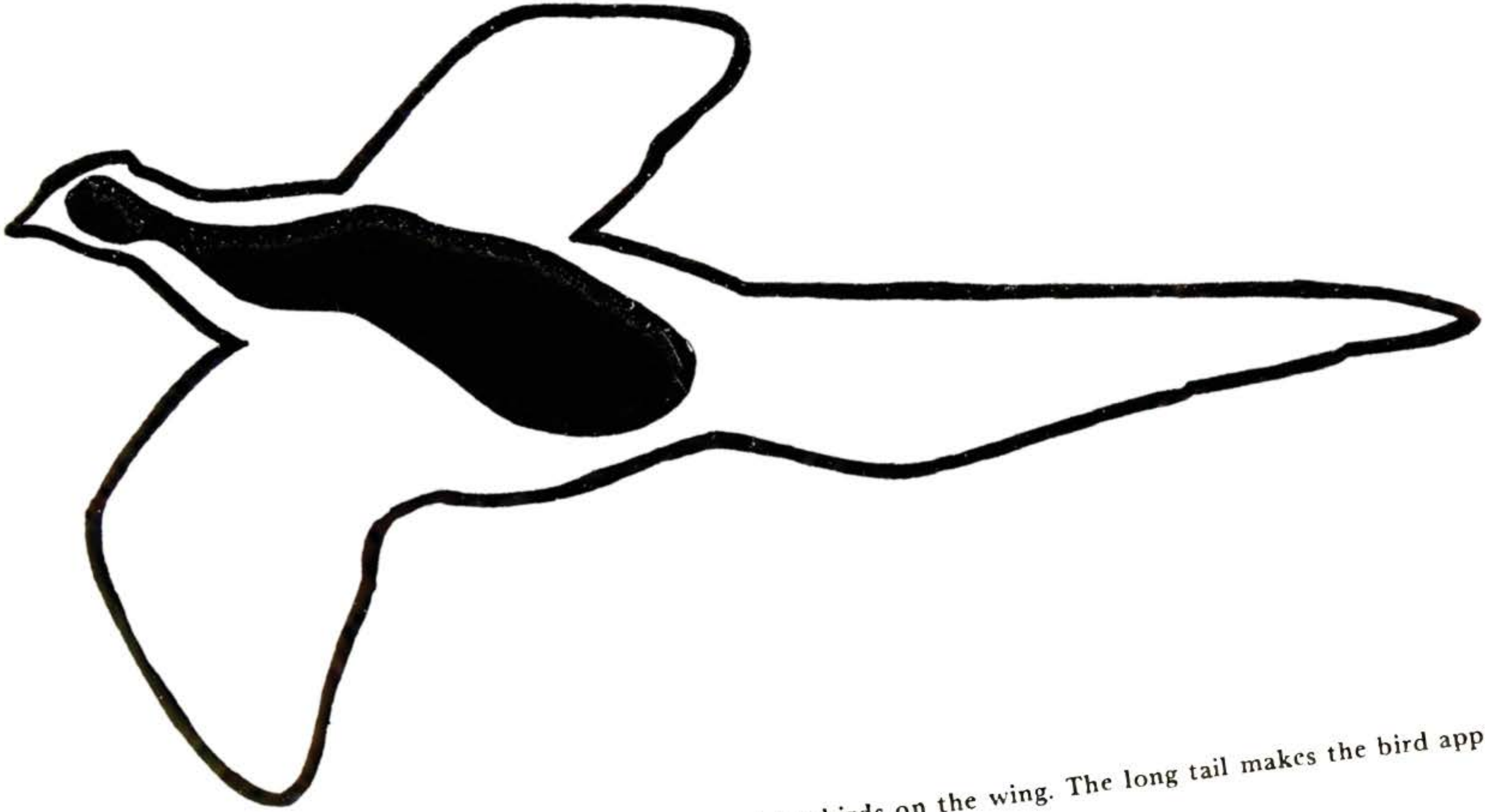
At the present time, the range of these birds is still limited. It is expanding, however, and in a few years the Chukar may take on a larger following as hunters discover it.

RING-NECKED PHEASANT

Outside of the dove, the most popular game bird in the nation is the pheasant. Big, colorful, exciting, and well-established, the ring neck is a great success story. Like the Chukar and grey partridge, the ring neck was imported to this country. Surprising to everyone was how well the bird adapted and made its home here.

The ring necks are found throughout the nation's northern half, except the mountain areas. They inhabit the edge country around farms. Ring necks are strong runners and will stick to the ground as long as possible before taking to the air. Once in the air, they can easily hit 40 mph but appear to be moving much slower due to their size.

Perhaps the biggest problem hunters have with the ring neck is its long tail. The tail gives the impression the bird is much larger than it actually is. In addition, the ring neck is often missed by gunners because they think the bird is flying slower than it is. These birds can take a lot of shot and for that reason most experienced pheasant hunters opt for a double, pump, or auto, leaving the single shots at home. A



The ring-necked pheasant is one of the most deceiving birds on the wing. The long tail makes the bird appear much larger than it is. Kill zone is black; cripple zone is grey.

RING-NECKED PHEASANT

Description: Length: 36 in. Weight: 5 lbs. Wingspan: 32 in. Tail: 22 in Coloration: *Wings* and *sides:* various browns. *Breast:* red brown. *Tail:* light brown with black bars. *Belly:* bronze. *Neck:* dark green. *Head:* dark green with red. *Other markings:* white ring around the neck.

Distribution: Northern half of the nation where there are farm lands with ample edge country. Not found in mountain areas.

Preferred habitat: Edge country along farm fields.

Table fare: Excellent

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Remarks (shot size/load)
Handguns or Rifles					
.22 Short		▢			illegal
.22 Long		▢			illegal
.22 Long Rifle		▢			illegal
.22 Magnum		▢			illegal
Centerfire		▢			illegal
Air Gun		▢			illegal
Shotguns					
10-gauge				▢	
12-gauge	▢				5 or 6 shot; medium loads
16-gauge	▢				
28-gauge			▢		
20-gauge		▢			
.410				▢	
Archery			▢		
Crossbow			▢		
Slingshot		▢			
Other		▢			easily trapped

pheasant that is hit will set its wings and glide to a landing.

Ring necks are great dog birds. If you don't have a dog to hunt with, the next best method is for two hunters to tie a fifty-foot rope between them and to hang several strips of white rag from the rope. The two hunters then walk a field where the pheasants are thought to be. The birds, rather than running between the hunters or away from them, will flush, thinking a whole army of hunters is after them. Pheasants are responsible for more varied hunting methods than any other bird. A novice hunter is better off going out on a few hunts with some experienced pheasant hunters than trying to master the complex world of pheasant hunting on his own. Of all the birds covered in this chapter, I think the pheasant is the most exciting and as dinner fare, it cannot be topped.

You may be discouraged to find I have not covered the prairie chicken in this chapter. These birds are still in their recovery phase, and hunting for them is so limited they are not a major game bird at this time.

9.

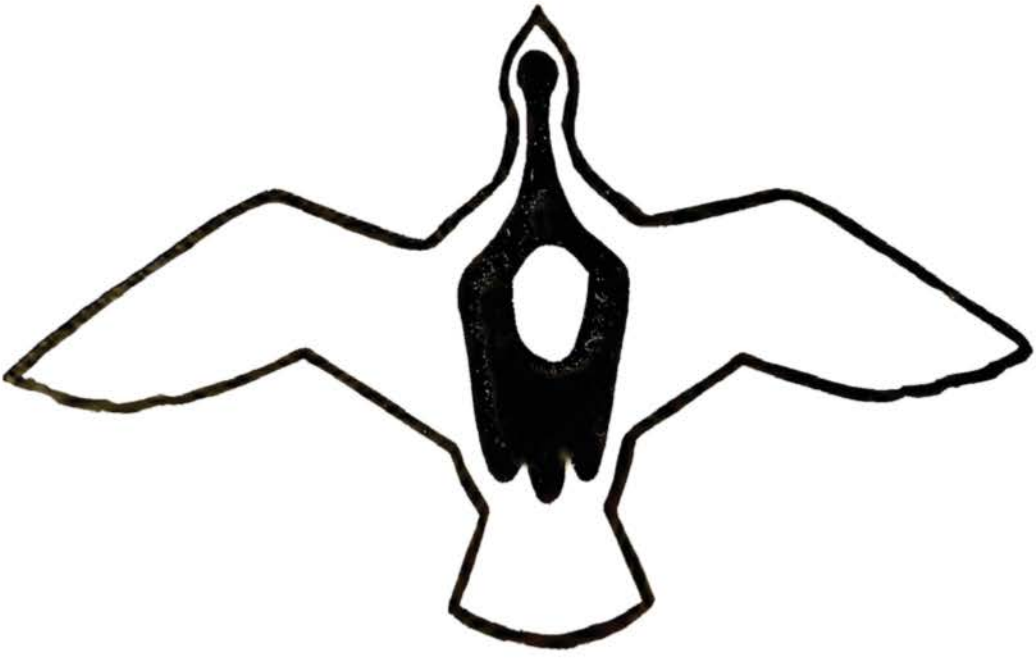
QUAIL

While the dove may rank as the most hunted bird in North America, the quail is no doubt the most important. Just ask any sporting-goods store owner in quail country and he'll quickly tell you just how important quail are! Millions of these birds are bagged each year by hunters who will subject themselves to a host of discomforts, including traveling long distances, for the chance to spend a few days in quail country.

It is not the quail's size that brings the hunters out; it is the sporting aspect of the hunt. No other bird in this country except perhaps the ruffled grouse has the ability to rattle even the best shotgunner. Hours can be spent by a hunter trying to find a covey of quail only to have the birds explode in flight and disappear before the hunter has realized what is happening. The ruffled grouse may be the king of the upland birds, but the quail is the champion game bird and is found throughout the United States.

Quail hunting can be as expensive as you want to make it. Some landowners offer elaborate quail hunts complete with dogs, horse-drawn wagons, mid-day lunch served in the field—all topped off with a quail dinner. Most of us opt to hunt the quail the way we always have. A group of hunters set up a hunt for the weekend, pile into their pickups on Saturday morning, drive out to quail country, unload, and go hunting.

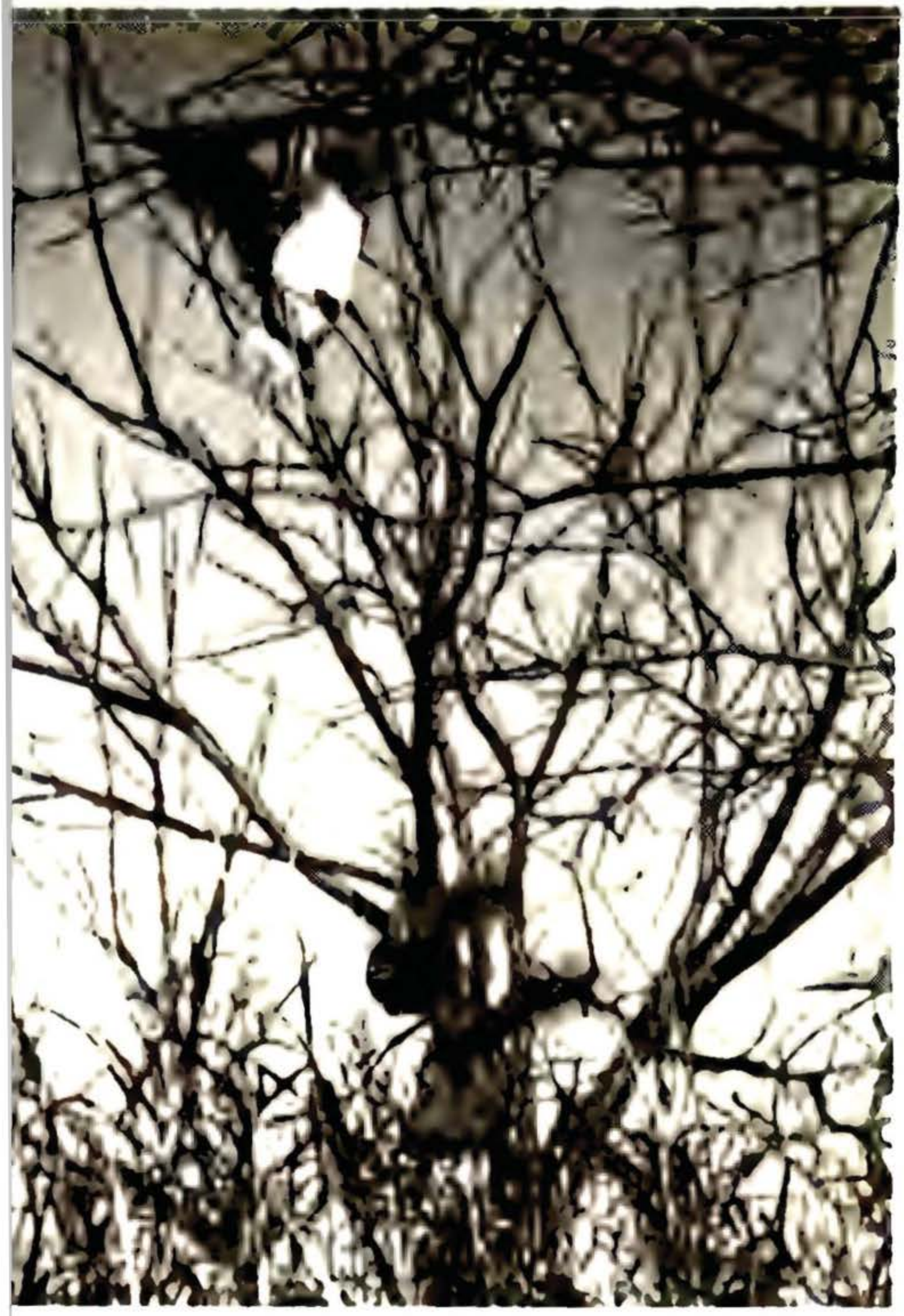
Although the size of the quail varies, depending in which



Quail require a solid hit in the black area. Shot will penetrate the breast (the grey area) without bringing down the bird. Quail hit in the grey area below the black kill zone will fall but then quickly limp away and hide.

An Oklahoma quail hunter confronts a covey of quail too close for a shot.

PHOTO COURTESY OF OKLAHOMA DEPT. OF WILDLIFE



part of the country you are hunting, the load and size of shot in your shotgun should remain fairly standard. The largest shot size should be 7 1/2 on down to 9s. The powder charge should be in the medium range of around 3 1/4 to 3 3/4 drams equivalent in a 12-gauge and scaled up accordingly in smaller-gauge guns. Usually the quail will take flight from ten to fifteen yards from the hunter and by the time your gun is up, they will be twenty-five yards away. A modified choke on your gun will give it a range of forty-five yards. Beyond that, even with a full choke, your chances of hitting a bird are slim.

To hunt quail, you have to know where the birds are. A quail hunter spends a lot of time each year visiting landowners and other quail hunters during the summer trying to locate the birds. Quail will live in an area where they are free from predators. As soon as predators move in, the quail move out. Quail are also easily disturbed by man's "progress." A few oddball coveys of quail may take up residence near a suburb, but if people, dogs, or cats begin to harass the quail, the bird will quickly disappear.

Depending on where you live in the country, the species of quail will vary. Each species has its own little quirks so that a hunting method used on the bobwhite, for instance, may not work on a scaled quail. Be sure you know which species of bird you will be hunting before you take to the field to avoid becoming frustrated in your hunting efforts.

MOUNTAIN QUAIL

The mountain quail is the largest of our quail. The bird is twelve inches long, has a wingspan of fourteen inches, and weighs about ten ounces. Home for the mountain quail is the high country of California, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and Nevada. These birds like brush-covered slopes, which can make hunting them difficult at best. A popular method is for

MOUNTAIN QUAIL

DESCRIPTION: Length: 12 in. Weight: 10 oz. Wingspan: 14 in. Coloration: *Wings:* brown with gray. *Sides:* same with white bars. *Breast, tail,* and *head:* slate blue grey. *Belly* and *neck:* rust. *Other markings:* Two feathers on top of the head are black and extend to the back.

DISTRIBUTION: Mountain areas of the West beyond the Rocky Mountains.

PREFERRED HABITAT: Brushy areas of mountains bordered by forest.

TABLE FARE: Excellent

	EXCELLENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR	REMARKS (shot size/load)
HANDGUNS OR RIFLES					
.22 Short				▢	
.22 Long				▢	
.22 Long Rifle				▢	
.22 Magnum				▢	
Centerfire				▢	
Air Gun				▢	
SHOTGUNS					
10-gauge				▢	
12-gauge	▢				
16-gauge	▢				
28-gauge	▢				
20-gauge	▢				
.410				▢	
Archery				▢	
Crossbow				▢	
Slingshot				▢	
Other				▢	

three hunters to join together on a hunt. In an area where the hunters are sure there are quail, one hunter will station himself at the end of a brush-covered slope while the other two hunters walk through the brush toward the stationary hunter, attempting to force the birds to flush.

Once the birds take to the air, they will quickly hit 35 to 40 mph and will fly straight away from the hunters toward safety. As soon as the birds feel safe, they will set their wings and glide to the ground. It is not uncommon to see mountain quail land ten or fifteen yards short of their new cover. This works to the hunter's advantage because he can close in on them for another chance.

Hunting mountain quail with dogs does not work that well because the birds will run away from danger. Dogs are most useful for picking up the downed birds in the thick brush. The very nature of these birds to hold to thick scrub brush makes them very difficult to find once down.

Mountain quail are held in high esteem by the wild fowl epicure. I suspect that a good part of the high esteem for this bird is simply the fact that it is the largest of the quail. Personally, I think all quail are delightful on the dining table.

SCALED QUAIL

Another good runner is the scaled quail. My first lesson on just how far and fast these birds will run came several seasons ago when I spotted a covey I had been trying to locate for the better part of an hour. Scaled quail hunting requires a good pair of binoculars. Rather than walking across the countryside to find the birds, I cruise along the back roads and cattle trails, stopping every few yards to study the surrounding country with binoculars.

The season was a week old and I was sure the coveys had been shot over so they would be very wary of anyone in the area. I spotted the covey walking along the edge of a large

SCALED QUAIL

Description: Length: 10 in. Weight: 5 oz. Wingspan: 14 in.
Coloration: *Wings:* grey-brown. *Sides:* white streaks. *Breast* and *tail:* slate blue. *Belly:* buff. *Head:* has white crest.

Distribution: Southwest U.S.

Preferred habitat: Arid areas.

Table fare: Excellent

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Remarks (shot size/load)
Handguns or Rifles					
.22 Short				☐	
.22 Long				☐	
.22 Long Rifle				☐	
.22 Magnum				☐	
Centerfire				☐	
Air Gun				☐	
Shotguns					
10-gauge				☐	
12-gauge	☐				7½, 8 or 9 shot: medium loads
16-gauge	☐				same
28-gauge	☐				same
20-gauge	☐				same
.410				☐	
Archery				☐	
Crossbow				☐	
Slingshot				☐	
Other				☐	

patch of cactus and thornbush. There was open ground all around the cactus patch, and I thought that if the birds ran into the cactus patch, I could flush them out. I laid down my binoculars, picked up my shotgun, and off I went. On cue, the birds ran into the cactus patch.

Right then I made the hunter's mistake—I had a vision of the birds on the dinner table. As I walked up on the cactus patch, keeping a close eye on where I thought the birds would flush, I caught movement to my left. The entire covey was running out of the cactus patch into the open toward a small hill. I chased the birds, only to have them clear the hill and then flush. By the time I got to the hill, the birds were gone.

Some hunters claim the only way to get scaled quail to flush is to run after them. Others claim that it takes two dogs, working from opposite sides, to flush the birds. The only method I've found that seems to work is to drive around the covey if possible and drop one hunter off, who pushes the covey toward one or two other hunters. If the hunters can herd the birds into a corner, they will have to fly. It takes more work to get a scaled quail to fly than any other bird—they will run away from the hunter if at all possible.

Scaled quail are small birds, about ten inches long with a thirteen-inch wingspan. At five ounces per bird, it takes a fair number of these quail to make a meal. The arid region of the southwest is the home of the scaled quail. They are found in the Oklahoma panhandle, Texas, southern Colorado, New Mexico, and Arizona.

CALIFORNIA QUAIL

One of the all-time great flushing birds is the California quail. These birds will sit tight in their cover until the last possible second before taking to wing. When they do start for the air, they go from sitting to 25 mph in a flurry of

CALIFORNIA QUAIL

DESCRIPTION: Length: 11 in. Weight: 7 oz. Wingspan: 12 in.
Coloration: *Wings:* grey. *Sides:* grey with white spots. *Breast:* blue. *Tail:* grey, white underneath. *Belly:* off-white; front is scaled feathers. *Neck:* blue-grey. *Head:* dark brown with white border. *Other markings:* Two black feathers on head curve forward.

DISTRIBUTION: West Coast of U.S.

PREFERRED HABITAT: Thick brush.

TABLE FARE: Excellent

	EXCELLENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR	REMARKS (shot size/load)
HANDGUNS OR RIFLES					
.22 Short				☐	
.22 Long				☐	
.22 Long Rifle				☐	
.22 Magnum				☐	
Centerfire				☐	
Air Gun				☐	
SHOTGUNS					
10-gauge				☐	
12-gauge	☐				
16-gauge	☐				
28-gauge	☐				
20-gauge	☐				
.410				☐	
Archery				☐	
Crossbow				☐	
Slingshot				☐	
Other				☐	

wings, and that is in the brush! As soon as they clear the brush, the birds zip up to 50 mph, which they will maintain until they are safely away from danger. Then they pick out a new thicket to hide in, set their wings, and glide into the brush—none of this gliding in some distance from the brush and then running into it. These birds will actually land in the brush. I have heard these birds crashing into the thick tangle of branches as they landed.

Experienced hunters have learned to do two things with these birds. When the first explosion of wings comes from the brush, the guns come up and the birds are picked out and dropped quickly. As soon as the birds have climbed and are winging toward the next thicket, one or two hunters stops shooting and watches the birds to see exactly where they go. The birds won't leave that thicket until forced out by the hunters. It is possible to flush the same covey two or three times. Unfortunately, some hunters use this method to wipe a covey out. A good hunter will jump the covey only enough times to get a few birds, but will leave the rest to reproduce.

The range of the California quail includes California, the Baja, Nevada, Oregon, Washington, and Idaho. The threat facing this very beautiful game bird comes not from hunting pressure but land developers. The habitat of the California quail is rapidly being developed for homes and is disappearing at an alarming rate.

California quail are medium-sized birds between ten and eleven inches long with a wingspan of twelve inches and body weight of six to seven ounces. These birds are very good table fare.

GAMBEL'S QUAIL

The true desert quail of this country is the Gambel's quail. It is found in the desert country of southeastern California, southern Nevada, Utah, southwestern Colorado, Arizona, and

GAMBEL'S QUAIL

Description: Length: 10 in. Weight: 7 oz. Wingspan: 12 in.
Coloration: *Wings* and *tail:* brown. *Sides:* rust brown. *Breast:* blue-grey to yellow on bottom. *Belly:* yellow-white. *Neck:* grey-brown. *Head:* black. *Other markings:* Two feathers on head form a striking plume.

Distribution: Arid southwestern U.S.

Preferred habitat: Desert Southwest.

Table fare: Excellent

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Remarks (shot size/load)
Handguns or Rifles					
.22 Short				☐	
.22 Long				☐	
.22 Long Rifle				☐	
.22 Magnum				☐	
Centerfire				☐	
Air Gun				☐	
Shotguns					
10-gauge				☐	
12-gauge	☐				
16-gauge	☐				
28-gauge	☐				
20-gauge	☐				
.410				☐	
Archery				☐	
Crossbow				☐	
Slingshot				☐	
Other				☐	

New Mexico. The Gambel is similar in size to the California quail at twelve inches long with a wingspan of fourteen inches and a body weight of ten ounces. The Gambel's quail is popular with hunters because, although not widely distributed, it will flush readily rather than run like the scaled quail.

The Gambel will flush somewhat like the California quail but at a slightly faster speed of 30 mph. This is the bird's peak speed; then it will set its wings and glide to safety.

HARLEQUIN QUAIL

I doubt if most quail hunters have ever heard of the harlequin quail, let alone seen one. The harlequin is the smallest of the quail with a maximum length of nine inches, a wingspan of only twelve inches, and a weight of four ounces tops. It is striking in appearance with a pattern of white streaks and stripes which the bird uses as camouflage. Whenever the bird is pressured, it simply squats next to a rock or in a thicket of brush and waits out the danger.

Not only are these birds small, they are very difficult to find. Harlequin quail prefer the steep, wooded slopes of the southwestern mountains of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and Colorado. They hide in the thickest brush they can find and unless kicked up by the hunter, will stay put in the brush and rocks. Most hunters who find a covey of these birds do so by accident, and there is very little hunting pressure on this species of quail. The few hunters who go after these birds rate their flesh as superior to all the other quails, but their small size requires a large number to make a meal.

BOBWHITE QUAIL

Add the total number of quail covered so far in this chapter taken by hunters each year and it will fall short of

HARLEQUIN QUAIL

DESCRIPTION: Length: 9 in. Weight: 4 oz. Wingspan: 12 in.
Coloration: *Wings:* grey-brown with white darts. *Sides:* grey with white spots. *Breast:* red-brown. *Tail* and *belly:* black. *Neck:* black with white streaks.

DISTRIBUTION: Southwestern mountain areas of U.S.

PREFERRED HABITAT: Rocky, wooded slopes with dense brush.

TABLE FARE: Excellent

	EXCELLENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR	REMARKS (shot size/load)
HANDGUNS OR RIFLES					
.22 Short				☐	
.22 Long				☐	
.22 Long Rifle				☐	
.22 Magnum				☐	
Centerfire				☐	
Air Gun				☐	
SHOTGUNS					
10-gauge				☐	
12-gauge	☐				
16-gauge	☐				
28-gauge	☐				
20-gauge	☐				
.410				☐	
Archery				☐	
Crossbow				☐	
Slingshot				☐	
Other				☐	

the total number of bobwhite quail downed by shotgunners each year. For many people, talking about quail is the same as talking about the bobwhite.

The range of the bobwhite quail is extensive. Although a few are found in the northwest corner of the nation, the main population is in the section of the country roughly east of Colorado, north as far as Nebraska, and south into Mexico. There are still a fair number of "gentleman's hunts" carried on in the South complete with horse-drawn wagon, fine food served in the field, and dogs trained for the hunt. All of this, of course, is quite expensive, and there is no reason for the average quail hunter to go through all this trouble and expense.

Most of the hunters who take off after these birds each year have learned to know the country where the coveys can be found. Bobwhite will return year after year to the same area providing predators don't drive them out and they are left free to raise their broods each spring. Many hunters will hunt coveys heavily until the coveys are down to a half-dozen birds. At that point, the covey is left alone. Bobwhite have an amazing ability to bounce back, and the following year the covey will again be two dozen or so birds.

Bobwhites are edge birds. They are most plentiful in areas where farmland borders woodland. In the dust bowl country, where windbreaks were planted and miles of hedgerows border country lanes, the birds have taken firm hold and their population is still expanding.

One of the most unusual methods of hunting bobwhites is calling the birds in. When a covey is jumped and shot over, the covey will scatter. Once the birds are on the ground, they begin rejoining each other, and their calling can be heard by the hunters. One hunter will then begin to call the birds to him. Although the birds will usually not join him, they will answer the call and the other hunters can locate the scattered birds to flush them again.

BOBWHITE QUAIL

DESCRIPTION: Length: 11 in. Weight: 6 oz. Wingspan: 15 in.
Coloration: *Wings, breast,* and *tail:* reddish brown with black. *Sides* and *belly:* white with brown edges. *Neck* and *head:* red-brown. *Other markings:* Male has white throat.

DISTRIBUTION: Eastern half of U.S. from Colorado/Kansas border north to Nebraska and south to Mexico.

PREFERRED HABITAT: Edge areas around farm fields.

TABLE FARE: Excellent

	EXCELLENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR	REMARKS (shot size/load)
HANDGUNS OR RIFLES					
.22 Short				☐	
.22 Long				☐	
.22 Long Rifle				☐	
.22 Magnum				☐	
Centerfire				☐	
Air Gun				☐	
SHOTGUNS					
10-gauge				☐	
12-gauge	☐				
16-gauge	☐				
28-gauge	☐				
20-gauge	☐				
.410				☐	
Archery				☐	
Crossbow				☐	
Slingshot				☐	
Other				☐	

The annual harvest of bobwhites is in excess of fifteen million birds. If the habitat can be stabilized and protected, there is no reason why the annual harvest could not go higher. The threat to the birds is not the hunter but the developer. Developers are pushing further and further out of the cities and destroying the lands needed by the bobwhite to breed and live. The result is that in many areas where the birds had once expanded their range, the birds are gone forever.

Bobwhite lack the plume found on other quail. It is a short plump bird that is a medium size for quail. The average length is eleven inches with a wingspan of fourteen inches and a weight of about six ounces. The birds flush easily and hit a peak speed of 50 mph in just several beats, before setting their wings and landing. Once the covey is scattered, it will begin to regroup immediately by calling.

GENERAL TIPS

Regardless of the species of quail you hunt, there are a few tricks that can help you get your bird.

First, walk slowly through quail country. A rapidly moving person will do little more than drive the birds away without ever raising a wing. The slower a hunter moves, the more concerned the birds become. I've watched quail hunker down and watch a hunter slowly approach and then suddenly explode into the air.

When a covey of quail flush in front of you, don't shoot into the covey hoping to knock one or two birds down. Pick out a single bird and follow it until the bird drops. As soon as that bird falls, wing on the next one, and so on. Carefully mark where the birds fall.

After flushing a covey of birds, don't walk straight to the area where they set down, but circle it to find out if there is an escape route the birds might have followed after landing.

Never wipe out a covey. With some species of quail, if you wipe out the covey, it may be years before a new covey moves into the area. Always leave four to six birds per covey. In the late season, if you jump one or two birds where there should have been a covey, leave the birds alone. They may be the only survivors.

Quail hunting is a sport that gets into the hunter's blood. It takes only one covey of birds exploding in front of you to hook you for life.

10.

WILD TURKEY

Snow had fallen on our spring turkey hunting camp for two full days, and by the time our clients arrived on Friday we had serious doubts about how the hunting was going to work out. We were not sure if we could get the hunters to sit on a stand long enough in the snow for a turkey to be called in.

As it turned out, the turkey hunting proved to be a real eye-opener. One hunter needed only to step out of the camp Jeep and shoot his tom; another hunter spent three full days tracking, calling, and finally nailing his big bird; and still another hunter shot his bird as it winged through camp one morning! Nothing we knew about wild turkey hunting seemed to mean anything on that hunt!

Actually, turkey hunting is one of the few hunting sports that makes demands on every aspect of the hunter's skill. From calling to marksmanship, turkey hunting demands the best. There are thousands of so-so turkey hunters who collect a bird every three or four years, but only a handful who manage to collect birds every year. I would rather take a man mule-deer hunting than wild-turkey hunting. The truth is, I believe I would have a better chance of getting the hunter a trophy mule-deer buck than an average tom turkey.

This is not to discourage anyone from taking up turkey hunting. In fact, I hope the difficulty of hunting wild turkey is the magic that will draw hunters to it. There is just enough skill needed in turkey hunting to make it a real challenge and enough luck involved to keep the novice in the ranks of turkey hunters.

Wild turkeys are creatures of habit. My wife and I drive the same highway to and from work several times a week. Throughout the spring and fall, we know we will see wild turkeys at one point along the road. There is another area I know of where if I sit long enough a flock of birds will come sauntering through. Until the birds are forced to change their route by hunting pressure, predators, or the weather, they will follow the same route every day.

If the birds are so predictable, how come they are so hard to hunt? Simple. They have amazing eyes and can spot anything moving inside a blind. They can hear the safety pushed off a shotgun fifty yards away. Wild turkeys have strong legs and are excellent runners. A wild turkey going uphill can outdistance a man in a few dozen yards. I once chased a wild turkey down a road in my Jeep at 45 mph! The bird finally angled off the road! As for flying, as big as the birds are and as much difficulty as they seem to have getting into the air, once they are up, they're gone. I've watched them twist and turn through the trees as easily as a grouse.

Turkeys use all of their senses to detect danger. Once they detect it, they flee at high speed away from it. If necessary, they will take to the air. That is what makes the birds so difficult to hunt.

To hunt wild turkey, you must meet the bird on its own terms, not the hunter's. To overcome its eyesight, the hunter must dress in a camouflage outfit from head to toe, with camouflage over the face as well. Even the gun should be camouflaged (or bow if bow hunting). A good stand should be selected days in advance in a place where the turkey is willing to come. A wily old tom will not cross from one ridge to the next to answer a call, and getting one to come uphill is just as difficult. If during the preseason scouting,

PHOTO COURTESY OF VERMONT DEPT. OF FISH AND GAME

A wild turkey can fly if it needs to escape.

you locate a ridge with a flock of birds on it and two or three toms, all you need to do is put a good blind in place; practice your calling until you have every gobble sound plus the yelps and squawks down pat; station yourself in the blind half-an-hour before sunrise; and start calling.

Turkey hunting is a two-season affair. The spring hunt, which is for toms only, is difficult because the whole effort is directed at convincing a tom that a younger male has invaded his turf and is trying to steal his hens. All of your techniques must come together perfectly to get a tom to come within gun range of the blind. In the spring the tom is interested in his females—but not to the point of being stupid! However, if the wise old tom is going to make a mistake, chances are he'll make that mistake in the spring when his instincts are leaning more toward love than survival.

Although most spring turkey seasons around the nation are for toms only, the fall seasons are usually for either sex. In the fall, there are some important changes in hunting methods. In the first place, the turkeys are no longer lovesick, and the standard method for calling the birds is to reproduce the yelps and squawks of a youngster lost from the flock. This sort of calling may bring in anything from a tom to a young hen to a whole flock. The birds will also be more wary and the hunter has to take double care not to be seen. A growing number of turkey hunters are turning to the use of portable tree stands for fall turkey hunting and ground blinds for the spring.

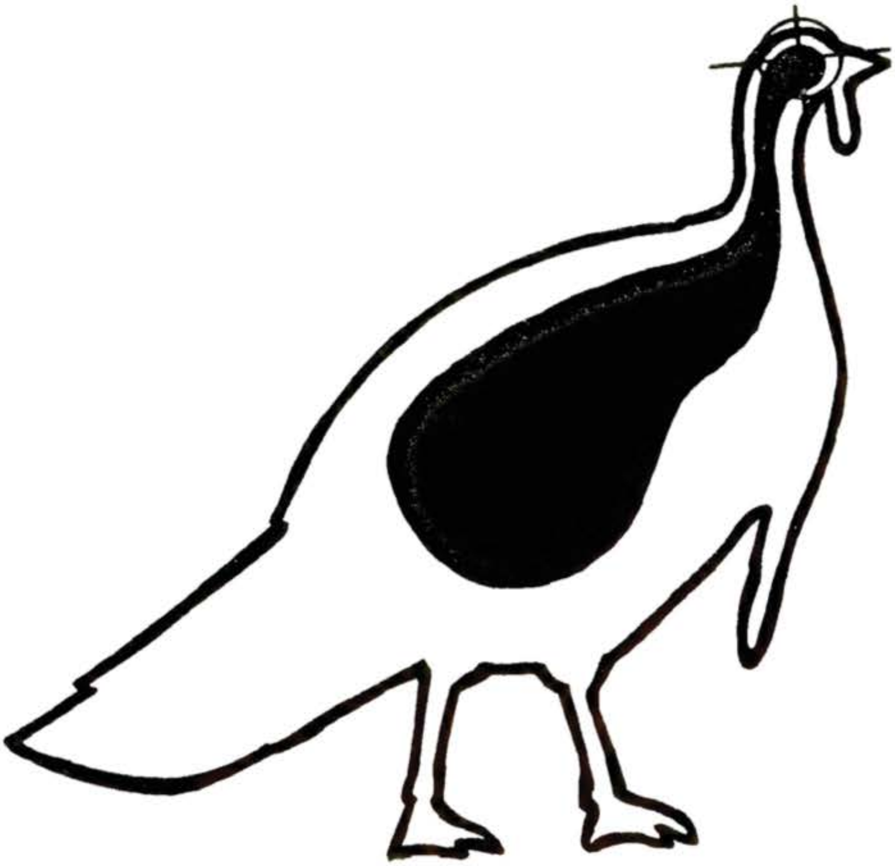
There are a number of firearms used for turkey hunting. The spring is usually a shotgun-only season, and the fall is both shotgun and rifle season (archery is legal in most states; check local regulations). For the shotgun spring season, the best turkey gun is often a double-barreled affair rather than a pump or auto. The pump and auto are too long to handle easily in a blind, and it is not uncommon for a bird to take two full loads of shot before dropping. The logic of the shotgun-only rule in the spring is the difficulty of telling the sexes apart. All tom turkeys have beards, which is a hairlike growth of feathers from the center of the breast. A shotgunner who gets a bird within range can easily see the beard on a tom turkey. There is no other way to distinguish a hen from a tom at shooting distance. Thus, the shotgun rule ensures that only toms will be taken if the hunter is careful.

Since the bird has to be called into shotgun range, any extra movement required by the longer shotguns may spook the bird as the hunter prepares to shoot.

Don't make the mistake of some hunters who cut down a fine pump or auto to make it a turkey gun. When the end of a shotgun is cut off, there is no longer a choke and you are left with a cylinder choke. You cannot control the shot at thirty to fifty yards and the target, the turkey head, is very small. A good double-barreled shotgun with a modified or full choke is an ideal turkey gun.

In the fall, when either sex can be taken and the chances of a bird being called in are slim, an excellent turkey gun—where it is legal—is the .22 rimfire magnum or other .22 caliber in centerfire. Equipped with a scope that will allow exact placement of the bullet at seventy-five to one hundred yards, these guns, similar to a scaled-down varmint rifle, are excellent turkey guns.

Turkey hunters commonly envision a wild turkey tom in full display in the woods with his tail fanned out, wings dragging, and chest puffed out as he tries to impress the local hens or scare off a smaller tom. Actually, the chances of seeing that display are pretty slim even in the spring. The first thing most hunters see is the head poking up from behind a bush or log. Then the hunter has to wait for the full bird to step into the open so he can see the beard. Both male and female turkeys have naked necks and heads except for a few bristlelike feathers. A caruncle or wart protrudes from the middle of the forehead, which is much larger on the male



When using a rifle, aim for the head to avoid ruining the meat or crippling the bird. A shotgun should also be aimed at the head.

WILD TURKEY

Description: Length: 35-50 in. Weight: 14-17 lbs. Wingspan: 50-56 in. Tail: 12-18 in.
Coloration: Basic color is bronze with iridescent brown, red, green, and black feathers. Wild turkeys will mate with domestic birds, producing spotted turkeys, which are domestic.

Distribution: Now found in all forty-eight lower states; currently, huntable populations only found in half the states but the bird's population is growing steadily.

Preferred habitat: Roosts in trees surrounded by water or on steep slopes. Habitat favored by deer is also favored by wild turkeys.

Table fare: Excellent

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Remarks (shot size/load)
Handguns or Rifles					
.22 Short			☐		30 to 40 yards
.22 Long			☐		same
.22 Long Rifle	☐				
.22 Magnum	☐				
Centerfire	☐				.222 or .223 in scoped rifle
Air Gun	☐				high velocity
Shotguns					
10-gauge	☐				2 or 4 shot
12-gauge	☐				4, 5 or 6 shot; magnum loads
16-gauge	☐				
28-gauge			☐		
20-gauge			☐		
.410				☐	
Archery		☐			broadhead-tipped arrow
Crossbow	☐				broadhead-tipped bolt
Slingshot				☐	
Other				☐	

than the female. Under the chin are found the wattles which extend down the neck. The color of the head, caruncle, and wattles changes from white to blue to bright red depending on the bird's mood; the color does not indicate sex.

Size is not an indication of sex either. An average tom weighs between fourteen and seventeen pounds with some older toms even bigger. The average female is about half that size. I've seen females, however, that were as big as males, so picking the biggest bird out of a flock is not going to ensure the hunter a tom.

Although the tom displays his tail, both the male and female are alike in coloration. I once watched a flock of turkeys on a hill opposite from me while deer hunting. In the sun, the birds varied from bronze to black with some shades of green. In the shade, the birds were all black. With my binoculars, I could tell that two of the birds were toms, but without the binoculars, when I could not see the beards, there was no way I could tell the difference.

The restoration of the wild turkey throughout the nation is one of the greatest wildlife success stories of our time. Today wild turkeys are hunted in areas where they never lived before, and the range of the birds is expanding every year. Wild turkey is one of the most important game birds in the nation, and states with turkey hunting report surges in the sale of hunting licenses. It is interesting to note that an area that supports a deer population has an excellent chance of supporting wild turkeys. Both animals feed on the same foods. Problems often arise, however, because they compete with each other for food during the lean, winter months.

Regardless of the method used to hunt the wild turkey—shotgun, rifle, handgun, bow and arrow, or crossbow—the hunter who brings home a big tom is in for a meal that will be remembered for its flavor, size and, most importantly, for the effort of the hunt.

11.

PEST BIRDS

There is a group of birds that are hunted not for their meat but because they are pests. These are crows, magpies, and starlings. Of the three, the crow may become a game bird in the future because it demands skill to hunt. I know a fair number of hunters who annually don camouflage clothing, build camouflage blinds, and hunt crows with all the excitement of duck hunting. Crows are fairly big birds, have sharp eyes, and are always on the lookout for their greatest enemy—man.

Crows are, without a doubt, the smartest birds in the nation. They have fought with and held their own against man since the early days of the nation. Control of these birds is important because they will do as much damage to man's crops as possible in a short length of time. They also raid the nests of waterfowl and upland birds with relish, stealing not only the eggs, but carrying off the young as well. If crows are kept in check by hunting pressure and other means so they don't have the chance to raid farmers and the nests of game birds, the vast amounts of carrion and insects they consume offset the damage these birds do otherwise.

The best method I've found for hunting crows is to locate a flyway between their roosting and feeding areas. Then build a blind and wait for the birds to fly past. Crow decoys work fairly well in bringing the birds within shotgun range. I've never had any success shooting from the same blind more than once; each day I change the location of the blind. The best hunting arm is a shotgun with a full choke, because the birds seldom fly low enough to allow short-range pass shooting. The load should be in the 3 3/4 drams equivalent range with No. 5 and 6 shot.

There are three species of crows. The largest is the common crow, twenty inches long with a wingspan of thirty-six to thirty-eight inches. These birds weigh nearly two pounds, and as they fly you can hear their wings "whoosh" through the air.

The fish crow is found along the East coast and in the Gulf states. It is slightly smaller than the common crow at sixteen inches long and a wingspan of thirty-five inches. The northwestern crow is only slightly smaller than the fish crow and presents a more streamlined appearance. The northwestern crow is found along the West coast from Washington to Alaska.

STARLINGS

There is no bird in this country than the starling that is a more unwelcome guest. The starling was brought to this country between 1872 and 1890 by Eugene Schieffelin who may be remembered as the man who brought about more destruction of crops by a pest bird than any other person living or dead!

Starlings eat grain crops in staggering amounts. I can remember growing up in Oklahoma and seeing thousands of these birds in a wheat field raiding the grain, and frustrated farmers with shotguns blowing the birds out of the sky. Every trick has been tried to bring these birds under control with no success at all. The population of starlings is around 100 million, and they consume several million tons of grain each year. These birds also destroy nesting sites of native birds and spread disease through their excrement that blankets city sidewalks.

About the only good thing that can be said about the starling is that it makes an interesting target for the shotgunner.

MAGPIES

The magpie has one serious fault, which is that it will pick off a tick from the back of a deer or other big game animal and then continue to pick at the sore until the animal dies. Magpies have been known to find a game animal slightly wounded by a hunter and go after the wound with a vengeance, finally killing the animal with a long, slow, suffering death. The magpie also frequently raids the nests of game birds. Their destruction of dove nests is legendary. For this reason, the birds are grouped as pests. While control of the magpie population is desirable, the magpie is in no way the pest the starling is. The magpie does serve two useful functions by picking clean the carrion from road kills and consuming vast numbers of insects. Magpies are hunted where their populations get out of control, but they are difficult to hunt. Like the crow, one of the best methods is to simply locate a flyway, build a blind, and wait for the birds to pass overhead.

All three of these pest birds can be hunted with a variety of weaponry, ranging from the shotgun to the slingshot. Bow hunters have found that starlings are great for practicing bird hunting with a bow, and shotgunners can sharpen their skills on starlings. In some areas magpies or crows are protected with hunting seasons. No one is foolish enough to protect the starling.

12.

IN CLOSING

I have not covered all the game animals and birds in this country. Waterfowl, which include ducks, geese, and cranes as well as shore birds, are not covered, nor have I covered medium or big game. To cover all of these animals in one book would require a work three times this size. What I have tried to do is introduce you to the world of hunting. For those of us who grew up hunting, it is always surprising when someone stops us and asks "What kind of shotgun do I use on rabbits," or, "Where do you find rabbits to hunt," or any one of several other questions that I hope this book has answered.

A veteran hunter might complain that this book has left out some important information. I do not think so. Every game animal covered in this book can have a complete work written about it. Even the lowly cottontail has been the subject of a complete book. If this short book with its chapters on various game animals could hope to cover all of the information about hunting these animals, there would be no need for all the outdoor magazines.

What I hope to have done with this work is make you aware of the various species of game animals that can be hunted for the dinner table or for sport and some of the methods. For the novice who is anxious to start hunting, the information in this book will prove valuable. For the survivalist who lives in the city but plans to survive a crisis by moving to the country, this book should help him start out in the wilds. As for the experienced hunter, I hope I have provided some "food for thought" on the species he hunts.

To everyone who reads this book I want to say that our wildlife is a renewable resource only so long as those of us who hunt and enjoy the outdoors are willing to protect it. It is obvious that the uninformed do-gooders who move to rural areas "to be closer to nature" are doing more damage by encouraging the developer's blade than all the hunters in the nation are capable of doing. The entire future of wildlife in this nation rests squarely on the shoulders of the men and women who hunt and love the outdoors.

Galen Geer has been hunting and fishing since his youth in Oklahoma. In addition to his work as a hunting and fishing guide in Colorado, Geer has authored hundreds of articles for such magazines as *Sports Afield, Fins and Feathers,* and *Survive* and is a contributing editor to *SWAT* and *Firepower.* Geer is expert in other weapons besides firearms: He is the author of *The Crossbow as a Modern Weapon* and serves on the advisory council of Barnett International, the crossbow and archery manufacturer.

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M·E·A·T ON THE TABLE

The brush suddenly explodes with a zigzagging ball of fur—and the hunt is on! From the mundane prairie dog to the sublime wild turkey, there are over 40 species that are fair game for the hunter, and renowned hunting and arms authority Galen Geer tells you about each one. Species charts describe each animal, in what part of the nation it can be found, its habitat, its table fare, and the right hunting arm and ammo for the job.

Today is the time to join the millions of Americans who are putting meat on their tables. Because of wildlife programs, says Geer, there are greater numbers of animals as well as species to hunt than at any time since WWI. You'll learn all you need to know to get your family's dinner—from choosing tasty game, finding the right hunting arm and ammo, to seasoning your catch properly. An introduction to the confusing world of hunting arms reviews shotguns, choke, shotshells, rimfires, pellet designs, handguns, air guns, bows and slingshots. All-in-all, a truly comprehensive course in the productive and enjoyable art of modern small-game hunting.

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